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The Ocean Bloodhound; OR, The Red Pirates of the Caribbees.

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CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGE SCHOONER.

LIKE a veil of fire, the sun was slowly sinking below the western horizon.

Homeward bound, after the completion of a most profitable trading cruise, the brig Nancy Jones lay nearly becalmed in the West Indies.

Overhead, the heavens were serene and beautiful, with never the smallest sign of danger.

And yet the keen, gray eyes of the Yankee skipper, Captain Zeke Jones, wore an anxious and uneasy look—a fact not long in attracting the attention of his mate, Job Rogers.

"What's in the wind now, Cap?" he asked, with a curious air.

"So far as I can see, everything is straight enough except this tarnal light breeze, and that's dyin' away with the sun yonder."

Very marked was the contrast between the two men as they stood there together.

Captain Zeke—as he was usually called—was a raw-boned Yankee, fully six feet in height. His skin, roughened by years of exposure, could be likened to nothing better than a piece of sole-leather, both in color and texture.

Over fifty years of age, he had followed the sea from his boyhood up. With his ripe experience, he read the signs of the heavens as if they were an open book.

Generally speaking, he was a man of few words; but, let an opportunity arise for action, and—to use his own expression—"the old man was right thar."

Sociable and friendly with his crew, who were all Down-Easters like himself, he still managed to enforce the most exact obedience. There was not a man among them but would have implicitly obeyed his every order.

The brig Nancy Jones—so named in honor of the skipper's wife, now awaiting him at home—was a strong and well-built vessel, with a good capacity of cargo and a corresponding sacrifice to speed.

She had for the past year been trading along the western coast of Africa, taking in ivory, skins and other valuables in exchange for cheap and showy gew-gaws.

From there she had crossed to South America and completed her cargo with what would sell at an amazing profit, in the "States."

When at last she sailed from Rio Janeiro, homeward bound, it was with a store of valuables

such as was seldom gathered in the hold of one vessel.

Job Rogers, the mate, was also an American; but he hailed from the State of "York."

In height he was not over five feet. Broad-shouldered, yet not too stout in frame, his every movement denoted the bull-like strength for which he was noted.

Yet with all this, he was a remarkably quiet man in general. Never seeking to provoke a quarrel with any one, he was never known to turn his back when one was forced upon him.

"Tain't so much the weather, Job," said the skipper, stopping to take a fresh bite of his favorite "pig-tail." "I'd be glad enough if this breeze would on'y freshen up a bit, that's sartin; but that ain't what I was thinkin' on."

"What then?"

The skipper rolled his huge quid under his tongue thoughtfully, and looking his mate squarely in the eyes, he replied:

"Pirates!"

The word, spoken in a low tone, was uttered

in a manner that showed the speaker to be in earnest.

"Sho!" exclaimed the mate, carelessly; "guess ye've made a mistake fer once, cap'n. Thar used ter be a few nests of them scoundrels in these parts, I'll allow, but they war all cleaned out a few years ago."

"I've got sartin intelligence," said Captain Zeke, slowly. "Just afore we cleared Rio, I got a line from our consul thar, sayin' that Pedro Santillez—may be choke to death on a hot potato—had taken up his quarters among some of these islands."

"Pedro Santillez?" repeated the mate, slowly; "that's the name of the scoundrel that cleaned out and destroyed so many vessels. He ran away at last from two or three cruisers that tried to capture him."

"That's the same infernal shark," assented the captain.

"But, Cap, there's a flaw in your story, somewhar. He never spared a living soul 'thout it might be a woman that he wished to carry to his den."

"True again, Job; but this news came from a chap that sprung overboard with a plank when his vessel war boarded by Santillez. He was picked up twenty-four hours arterward by a Brazilian bark, and carried to Rio. No one knows for sartin where the fellow has his 'rendevoo,' but it's some-whar in this neighborhood that the affair happened. I ain't thinkin' so much of myself, though the cargo air purty valuable an' this air my last cruise. We've plenty of arms aboard, an', with the help of our gun for'ard, we might catch him as good as he sent it. I should tackle us. It's a thought of Kernel Sanders' lady and her child, down thar in the cabin, that bothers me."

"Bad luck in having a peep-coat on board, anyhow," remarked the mate, who, like sailors, had unlucky omens go by.

"You're right thar, Job; but, you see, the Kernel was called home to the States so suddintly that he had to leave 'em behind. He hails from my own place, you know, an' so when his wife met me in Rio, an' axed fur a passidge, I couldn't refuse."

"You'd been a hog-beggin' yer pardon fer the word—if you had," replied Job, promptly; "But—"

"Sail ho!" came the cry at that instant from the look-out stationed in the foretop-mast cross-trees.

"Whar away, you lubber?" cried Captain Zeke, as he snatched his telescope from its brackets.

"Two p'int's off the lee quarter, sir. Looks like a schooner."

Captain Zeke adjusted his glass and gazed long toward the point indicated.

"Wall!" asked the mate, inquiringly.

"I can't see very well fer the sun," was the reply; "but I don't like the chap's looks. You've seen sarvice in these latitudes afore; let's have your opinion of that chap."

Job Rogers was less time in coming to a conclusion.

"Bare poles," he muttered; "low in the water, an' built for



SANTILLEZ.

a big spread of canvas. Anchored, too, I should judge. She's got a kinder wicked look to me, cap'n, and— Consarn it all, thar goes the sun, an' it's on-sartin' what that chap ralely is."

"At any rate we're safe enough from him for the present," replied Captain Zeke. "That chap's a good piece to leeward, an' if I ain't mistaken we'll have another breeze afore eight bells. Best say nothin' yet to the crew about what we think until we're more sartin'."

"All right, sir."

"An' keep a sharp look-out in every direction, for there may be more of them fellows around. I'll snatch a few hours' sleep now, so as to be ready if anything should turn up. Call me at once if you sight anything suspicious."

The mate began pacing the deck, uneasily watching the flapping sails, and occasionally whistling for a breeze. He paused at length beside the sailor who held the wheel.

"Steerageway on yet, Tom?"

"Barely, sir; she keeps her head, and that's all. Beggin' yer pardon fer the question, Mr. Rogers," he added, "but, what war that craft to leeward?"

"Don't know, Tom. Some coaster between these islands, perhaps."

"No coaster in these parts, sir, you knows it," was the grim reply, "at least not schooner-rigged."

"You've a good pair of top-lights, Tom," said the mate, dryly; and fearing the inquisitive man might ask too many questions, the mate left him.

In those latitudes the sun sinks very rapidly; hence by this time it was dark; but, contrary to the usual custom, not a light was shown on board the brig.

The mate had intimated to the crew that they were in dangerous waters, but that was all.

Nothing but the flapping of the sails against the yards served to denote her presence in the darkness.

The mate, lighting a pipe, had perched himself upon the weather-rail, and was busy revolving in his mind the subject of the strange craft they had sighted.

On deck, the crew on watch were listening to a yarn, spun by one of their number.

"Steerageway's gone now, sir," announced Tom Longstreet, the helmsman, in the course of another half-hour. "I'll just take a smoke myself while we're waitin' for a breeze."

He filled his pipe carefully, and struck a match.

As he was about to apply it to the tobacco, his keen eye—for he could almost see in the dark like an owl—suddenly glanced over the rail.

"Sail on the weather-beam!" he shouted, as the match dropped unused from his fingers. "Thunder! she'll be into us if they hain't careful."

CHAPTER II.

THE PIRATE'S PRIZE.

"She's bringin' the wind with her!" he added, quickly.

Then, raising his voice, he yelled: "Sheer off, you lubber! Are you drunk? You'll be afoul of us in another minute!"

The mate, who had been sitting with his back toward the spot, turned suddenly to see an immense spread of canvas slowly but surely bearing down upon them; but, even then he did not suspect the truth—not until the stranger rounded up and shot alongside.

The next instant a crowd of swarthy villains were clambering over the sides.

"Defend yourselves, men! We're boarded by pirates!" rung out the deep voice of Job Rogers. "Hold the deck for one minute and I'll bring you help!"

"Down with the pirates!" cried Tom Longstreet, seizing an iron belaying-pin from the fife-rail.

As he spoke, the first villain in his reach dropped to the deck with a crushed skull.

Alas! the alarm had been given just five minutes too late. Like a swarm of angry bees, the pirates poured over the side of the brig. Brave Tom Longstreet went down under a savage blow from a cutlass.

Job Rogers, the mate, had placed one foot upon the companion-way to give the alarm.

At that instant the leader of the villains struck him over the head with the butt of a pistol, but not before he had managed to yell out—"Pirates aboard, Cap!"

In less time than it takes to narrate the affair, the Brig Nancy Jones was in full possession of the pirates.

The latter—some two dozen swarthy ruffians in all—stood grouped together near the quarter-deck. Savage-looking fellows they were, that regarded a human life as nothing. Desperadoes of every nation were represented in their motley faces. Their pistols and cutlasses still glittered in their murderous hands.

The crew of the brig who were still unharmed had managed to retreat to the fore-castle and bolt themselves in. Their enemies were now waiting an order from their leader before renewing the attack. The latter, a giant in size, was standing near the wheel, a grin of sardonic satisfaction resting upon his ugly features. His black, wiry hair was partly concealed by a gaudy handkerchief twisted around his head. The collar of his shirt was thrown wide open, revealing a hairy, muscular chest, tanned by exposure.

Sailor to the core, he was none the less a hardened scoundrel.

"Well done, my brave lads!" he exclaimed, in somewhat thick tones, as if he was already under the influence of liquor. "Well done, I say! Have you finished the crew, Carlos?"

"They're barred in the fore-castle, sir," replied the sailor addressed.

"Haw! haw!" roared the pirate; "caught like

rats in a trap, eh? By all the saints! we'll have some rare sport with them before we leave this craft. Some of you jump on board the Isabelle and get fenders out that she may not rub all the paint from her pretty sides. The rest of you can guard those tricky Yankees, until I see what kind of a prize we've stumbled on this time."

So saying, he returned his cutlass to its sheath and descended the companion-way. Two of the pirates had already been before him to clear the way.

As he entered the cabin, his eye fell upon Captain Zeke, whose arms were now pinioned tightly behind him. There was a ghastly wound in his left temple, from which the blood was still flowing.

"A crack in the skull, eh, Cap!" exclaimed the pirate, with a coarse laugh, as he leaned against the cabin table and eyed the bound man with a satanic grin.

"Sorry to make you so much trouble," he added, coarsely, "but, you see, we've been somewhat out of luck lately, as you Yankees say, and so we had to take up with even such trash as this, although it ain't what we deserve."

"You'll get it yet, never fear—a rope around your villainous neck," said Captain Zeke, defiantly.

"Keep a stopper on your jaw-tackle, shipmate," growled the villain, deliberately spitting a stream of tobacco-juice in the face of his helpless victim. Talk a little more civilly to me or I'll toss you over to feed the sharks. Where's your papers?"

Wounded as he was, his arms tightly pinioned to his sides, and at the mercy of the cutthroat before him, it would have been madness to refuse an answer.

"You'll find them in my desk in the state-room yonder," he said, reluctantly.

The pirate turned on his heel and proceeded to the spot.

The first article upon which he laid his hands, was a heavy canvas bag.

"Gold!" he muttered, exultantly, as he shook it up to listen to the musical jingle of the coins. "Not such a bad haul, after all! Now, then, to see what there is below hatches."

Tossing the bag carelessly upon the cabin table, he next drew out a bundle of papers and sat down to peruse them.

He was a poor hand in deciphering the English language, and it took him some little time to study out the articles enumerated.

"Not a bad cargo," he exclaimed in satisfaction. "It's a long time since I've seen so much capital between one vessel's decks. By all the saints, here's a passenger list, as I'm a sinner! Mrs. Colonel Sanders and—a petticoat aboard, eh? That's better yet! That is, I mean, if she happens to be young and good-looking. I say, skipper, whereaway have ye stowed this bit of cargo?"

The old captain's face was as pale as death.

"For God's sake, spare her!" he gasped. "Take the brig and all that's in her, if you will, but spare the lady from your clutches."

"Oh, ho!" chuckled the pirate; "how comes it that you're so deeply interested in the matter? Maybe the woman is a widow and you're looking after her yourself? However, you'll have enough to do to take care of yourself, just now, I fancy."

There was a dangerous gleam in the rascal's eye as he turned and left the after cabin. His eye had caught sight of a door which he rightly conjectured led to the lady's quarters.

No sooner was his back turned than the two scoundrels who had remained to guard the skipper, proceeded to help themselves to liquor. Their roving eyes had been quick to see the decanter which stood in the captain's state-room.

So sudden and complete had been the capture of the brig that even the watch below had not been disturbed in their slumbers.

Nor was it strange that the lady—a sound sleeper and ignorant of danger—had not been disturbed.

The pirate turned the knob of the state-room door. It was locked from the inside.

In no way disturbed by the fact, the pirate drew off for a moment. Hurling the weight of his powerful frame against the obstacle, the door gave way with a crash. As it flew open, the lady started up suddenly from a sound slumber, with a cry of terror.

The swinging lamp above her threw a dim light on the scene.

Instinctively divining the truth, she cried, in accents of terror:

"For God's sake, spare my boy!"

"Bother take the brat. I've not laid eyes on him yet," exclaimed the pirate, gazing gloatingly on the woman before him. Blind to all but that, he had not before noticed the cot of the sleeping child close beside him.

"Ah, there he is," he added, as the child awoke with a cry of "mamma."

A sudden thought darted through the pirate's evil heart. Snatching the terrified child from his couch, he eyed him with a savage scowl.

His ruse was successful.

Without a thought of her own danger, actuated only by a mother's instinct to protect her own, the beautiful woman sprang forward to snatch her child from the ruffian's grasp.

As she did so, the villain released the child and threw his brawny arm around her.

"Ha, my beauty!" he said, "give us a kiss from those pretty lips, and you—"

But the sentence was never completed.

At that instant a door at the opposite end of the cabin flew open with a crash.

With one bound a dark object was upon him, and an iron first struck the villain a blow that sent him reeling against the wall, half-blinded by the sudden attack.

CHAPTER III.

A SUDDEN INTERRUPTION.

In another instant, the pirate had recovered his scattered wits.

"Ha, curses on me, but who is this?" he cried, as his pistol flashed from his belt.

"Job Rogers, the mate of this craft, you black-hearted scoundrel!" was the cool reply.

It was indeed the courageous mate, who, recovering from the pirate's blow, and finding the quarter-deck deserted, had crept around and entered the cabin by the forward door, to be on hand at a most critical moment.

"Mate?" snarled the pirate; "you'll be shark's meat in another moment."

Job Rogers stood watching his enemy with a gleam of defiance in his eyes, but he made no reply.

Seeing that his enemy was unarmed, the pirate uttered a contemptuous laugh and shoved the pistol back in his belt. Confident in his own strength, and on his guard, he feared no living man.

The woman, her eyes turned pleadingly upon the pirate, waited breathlessly for what would ensue.

"I haven't had that kiss yet, my beauty," said the scoundrel, as he again made a movement as if to snatch the child.

But, even as he did so, Job Rogers was upon him like a thunderbolt.

Ere the pirate could fairly realize the fact, the iron fingers of the mate were clutched in a viselike gripe around his throat.

"Help!" gurgled from his lips, as he strove in vain to release his pistol from his belt.

It would have been all up with him in another moment, had not the two rascals from the after-cabin hurried to his aid.

A strong blow from the butt of a pistol caused the mate to relax his grasp.

Seeing his danger, and before the pirate could collect his scattered senses, the mate turned upon his new assailants. Striking out right and left the cleared his way, and with one bound reached the deck.

The three men were close behind him.

As the first one touched the deck he received a blow from that iron fist that laid him bleeding and senseless at the mate's feet. Quick as a flash the latter seized the pistol that had fallen from the ruffian's grasp. Turning it full in the face of the second scoundrel, as he touched the deck, the resolute defender pulled the trigger, and the man dropped dead, his brains scattered around him.

The leader at that instant leveled his own weapon and fired.

Job Rogers felt a sharp, stinging sensation in his left arm, but in his excitement he heeded it not. Reaching out those terrible arms, he seized his enemy in his powerful grasp, and poising the bulky form for an instant in the air, he hurled him over the vessel's stern into the sea.

The rest of the pirates, taking the alarm, came rushing aft in a body to their leader's aid. A storm of bullets began to whistle around the head of the courageous mate; pulling the slide of the companion-way, he sprang into the cabin and closed the doors, then he sprang to the captain's side and hurriedly released him.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Cap!" he said, coolly. "We kin hold our own ag'in' the whole pack of 'em, now."

"Ah, if we could only get a chance to arm the crew!" sighed the old man. "As it is, the scoundrels will only scuttle the ship and drown us like rats in a cask. Thank God, the lady is spared from these wretches, at least. Better go down in the old craft, like brave sailors, than die like dogs at the hands of such rascals."

While this scene was transpiring below, a no less important one was taking place above.

The wind had gradually risen, though still light.

Glancing to windward, one of the pirate's crew uttered a cry of alarm. The moon was slowly rising, and in its faint light they could see a large ship bearing down upon them.

A sudden panic seemed to seize them at the sight. Like a pack of frightened wolves, they hurried pell-mell on board the schooner.

As they reached her deck, they saw the form of their leader standing amidstships. Drenched from his recent ducking, and supported on each side by the arms of two of his followers, his eyes shone like those of a demon. The spot where he stood was red with blood, and no wonder.

One of the pirate's feet was entirely missing!

Still, the determined villain was the master of his men.

"Bring the woman with you, lads," he cried, hoarsely.

"Too late, senor," was the reply. "The mate has taken the odd trick by barring the cabin doors, and yonder comes a fellow that means us mischief."

The pirate glanced over his shoulder at these words.

Then he cried suddenly: "Pass up that keg of powder, boys, and cut the fuse to five minutes. Throw it down the brig's hatchway, and bundle on board the schooner. Lively, now, lively!"

The men needed no urging now, for their experienced eyes had shown them that the ship approaching was a man-of-war and meant fight.

As quickly as possible the brig's hatches were lifted and the powder-keg lowered among the goods, with the fuse burning.

Then the line holding the schooner to the brig was cut, and dropping astern, the pirate put up her helm and fell over before the wind.

Her huge spread of canvas and light draught enabled her to walk rapidly away in the rising breeze.

The pursuing vessel had at first only suspected something wrong from the manner in which the two craft were yawing about. As she approached near

er, however, her commander realized the truth, but by this time the schooner was well clear of her victim.

The cruiser began piling on her canvas from truck to water's edge.

"Curses on our luck!" ground the pirate leader, writhing in agony upon a couch placed on deck so that he could watch his pursuer.

The cause of the strange catastrophe that had befallen him is soon explained.

He who had lately threatened to make shark's meat of his enemies, had narrowly escaped that horrible death himself.

The pirates on the schooner were lifting him from the water, when there was a rush, a snap of a pair of voracious jaws and one of the pirate's feet had dropped into the gullet of a monstrous shark.

Raining terrible curses on his misfortune, the pirate was still game to the last.

Supported by his men, he had actually determined to board the second time in order to take terrible revenge upon his victims. At all hazards he had determined to secure the woman.

The sight of the cruiser, however, caused him suddenly to abandon his purpose.

"At any rate," he growled, "they'll meet their death in another way."

He glanced at his watch.

"One minute more," he hissed, "and I shall see my revenge. Only a minute more," keeping his eye fixed upon the silent brig astern—"then the accursed Yankee craft yonder will be blown to atoms. Keep your eyes on her, my lads, and you'll see some fine fireworks. Curse them all, I say."

CHAPTER IV.

SAWBONES IN A NEW ROLE.

Not long did the pirates have to wait to be assured of the character of their pursuer.

There was a sudden flash, but it was not the expected explosion. No, the round shot that whistled over their deck was proof positive that the ship in pursuit had opened her batteries.

Very swiftly, now, the wind continued to rise.

Every stitch of the pirate's canvas was drawing to the best advantage.

As the cruiser passed under the brig's stern, the pirate schooner's helm was suddenly put hard-a-lee, and the next instant she was heading close up in the eye of the wind.

A thorough sailor was the man who commanded her.

The cruiser was unable at that moment to follow his example without colliding with the brig. She could do nothing until she had run to leeward of the Nancy Jones.

Then it was too late, for the schooner now had the weather gauge and was making the best of it.

It was the very thing upon which the pirate had calculated, and thoughts of the cruiser's ability to harm him seemed to trouble him but little now.

Another important matter claimed his attention at the time.

"Two full minutes past the time and yonder craft is still above water. Pedillo, come here!" cried the desperate chief.

A swarthy Spaniard approached the reclining pirate with a crestfallen air.

"You arranged the powder-keg as I told you?" demanded the chief, with a darkening scowl.

"Si, senor."

"It was to have how many minutes to explode?"

"Five, senor."

"It is now three minutes past the time, you dog. Take that for your infernal bungling!"

As he uttered the words he snatched a pistol from his belt and fired point blank at the wretch before him.

The man dropped dead to the deck, without a groan.

A low angry murmur broke from the pirate's crew as they witnessed the act.

"Avast there, my hearties!" shouted the pirate chief, his eyes shooting fire. "The first dog that grumbles shall have the same dose."

Well had these savage wretches cause to protest against such base ingratitude. The man shot down before their eyes was one of the two who had shortly before saved him from a watery grave; but a real human brute, the leader was deaf to all feeling of gratitude; indeed, he even blamed his rescuers for not having been an instant quicker with their assistance, for that instant would have saved him the awful mutilation.

"Send John Frazer here!" said he, as the crew slowly scattered.

The man alluded to presently appeared before the pirate.

He formed a strange contrast to the rest of the crew.

Tall and well-built, he had an air of quiet self-control about him that marked him as no common person.

Nor was there anything in his face that betrayed any traces of cruelty in his nature.

Out of place he certainly was, and yet, how came he there?

John Frazer quietly eyed the writhing scoundrel before him and waited for orders.

"What are you gaping at me for?" growled the pirate, angrily. "Don't you see that I'm losing blood from the bungling way those chaps tied up my stump? Get to work at once and have your job over with as quick as possible."

As he spoke, a second round shot from the cruiser's guns came whistling over their heads.

It was followed by a splintering of wood and the maintop-mast of the schooner dropped over to leeward, carrying with it the gaff top-sail.

"Up with you, boys, and clear away the wreck!" ordered the pirate, coolly. "I fancy he'll give us no more trouble for we're leaving him behind fast, and it spoils his headway to use that gun."

While he was speaking, the man known as John Frazer was making a critical examination of the pirate's wounded limb.

"Well?" asked the latter, inquiringly.

"The leg will have to come off just below the knee, sir," was the cool reply.

"Murder me a second time, eh?" replied the pirate. "Well, if there's no help for it go ahead!" and the pirate sunk back upon the couch.

No keen surgical tools were brought into service; neither was the patient stupefied with chloroform to deaden the pain. He merely took a huge draught of rum, and then lighting a cigar, he watched the operator while the flesh was cut away with a sharp-sheath-knife.

An ordinary handsaw was brought into requisition to sever the bones.

Notwithstanding the rude instruments, the operator evidently understood his business thoroughly.

With dextrous fingers he tied up the exposed blood-vessels, and ended his task by tightly incasing the limb in bandages.

Despite the pain the pirate must have suffered, he did not allow his cigar to go out during the whole transaction.

No one, by looking at his impassive face, could have guessed what a terrible struggle the effort cost him.

Courage, even if it is only of the brute kind, will always win admiration.

At the sight of their leader's iron nerve, his men stood yet more in fear of him.

His temper, however, had suffered by the ordeal he had passed through. Under his cool exterior, a desperate and savage mood was raging.

"Furies!" he muttered under his breath, "and what will the captain say when I make my report? Curses on my luck. I'd rather have lost the other leg than to go back to him with that pretty spar missing. Nearly half the crew, too, lost since I began this unlucky cruise! How was I to know that the cruiser was around in these waters? I believe it's our old enemy, the 'Vixen.' I'm pretty certain I recognized her rig. However, we've shown her a pretty clean pair of heels again, and by daylight she'll not be seen, I fancy."

It was even as he said. When the sun arose the next day, no trace was to be seen of their late pursuer upon the distant horizon.

Not until he was certain of this fact, did the pirate direct his men to convey him below. Then, for the first time since the cruiser's attack, he turned over his command to his lieutenant.

"Head for the rendezvous," he said, gruffly; "but if you happen to see any sail in the meantime, let me know at once."

"Si, senor," was the reply, and closing the door upon his wounded chief, the man regained the deck.

Meanwhile the pirate crew had gathered in a knot upon the fore-castle. Spaniards, Portuguese, Lascars; what a motley crowd they seemed by daylight!

The gabble of their various tongues seemed a Babel of sounds to the uninitiated listener.

Most of their conversation was carried on in the Spanish tongue, understood by them all.

"I call it an infernal shame," said one of them. "I felt like putting my knife through him for it."

The conversation was upon the subject of Pedillo's death at their captain's hands.

His shipmates nodded assent to the boldly spoken words.

The mysterious individual, John Frazer, stood leaning thoughtfully upon the rail not ten feet distant.

Distrustful of him as the pirates were, there was no attention paid to his presence from the fact that he was supposed to understand nothing of the tongue they were using.

Had they observed the twinkle in his eyes, they might have had doubts of his ignorance.

A few of the ruffian crew were in favor of inflicting summary vengeance upon their leader. The majority, however, stood too much in awe of his courage to make the attempt. It was almost certain death to him who should undertake the task.

It was finally agreed between them that the whole matter should rest quietly for the present. Should a favorable opportunity arise, however, it was to be seized at once.

They were about to separate, when the cool voice of John Frazer—now speaking in excellent Spanish—chained them to the spot:

"Wait, my lads," said he, quietly. "I've heard it all, and have a better proposal to make to you."

Spellbound to think that they were discovered, and uncertain for the moment of the man's intentions, they gazed angrily upon him. A dozen hands were laid upon the hilts of their sharp knives.

Not one of them but was able to throw those knives with deadly precision of aim, and the assurance that the man before them was an enemy, and these knives would be buried in the speaker's heart.

Undismayed by it all, with an almost imperceptible sneer on his lips, John Frazer said, quietly:

"I will aid you in your purpose, men, if you will aid me in mine."

"You know ours already," said one of the pirates; "let us now hear yours."

"It is soon stated. Agree to put me ashore as soon afterward as possible, and I will promise to aid you by all means in my power."

"He speaks fair," declared one of the men, in an undertone, to his companions. "What think you? would it be safe to trust him?"

It was settled, at length, that they should do so.

They soon found that the man before them was a born leader.

To their muddled and rather contradictory plans, he brought a brain quick to see the practicable and discard the reverse.

John Frazer showed them, in a few words, that the schooner at that moment carried treasure enough to supply all their wants for a lifetime.

He also cemented their confidence in him by stating that his share could be divided among them, for he had sufficient wealth of his own if allowed to reach it. He showed them that it would be an easy matter to run into some small port, take their treasures to other countries, and spend them as they pleased.

The picture he drew of their future was a most flattering one to the pirates. They had become rather tired of the discipline to which they had so long been subjected. Supplied with all the wealth necessary for their needs, what wonder that the bait was so highly attractive?

Before John Frazer had finished his harangue, they had fully resolved to follow him to the death, if need be. No other man in their number could have exercised such a wonderful influence and control over them.

He had boldly declared his purpose of killing their enemy with his own hand; and they had seen enough of him to know that he was as brave as their own disabled leader.

In his cabin below, the latter was writhing uneasily upon his couch, and plotting how to make his report as favorable as possible to the captain ashore, whom even he dreaded.

On deck, his crew had just finished a plan that, if successful, would render such a report out of the question.

CHAPTER V.

THE HUMAN TIGER IN HIS LAIR.

On a small rock-bound island, distant but a few miles from the spot where the brig was so lately attacked, stood the pirates' rendezvous. To all outward appearance it seemed nothing more than a barren, deserted spot, guarded on every hand by dangerous reefs, over which the long billows dashed spitefully. Viewed from seaward, it seemed an inaccessible island and nothing more.

For all that, there was a channel leading to it by devious paths among the sharp rocks and submarine reefs—a channel barely wide and deep enough to admit the pirates' schooner, and which ended in a smooth rock-bound basin, which a jutting cliff effectually screened from any prying eyes to seaward, should any such chance to pass the spot.

Half-way up that steep ledge, and hollowed in the rock itself, stood the quarters of Pedro Santillez, the dreaded pirate chief.

A small window, giving a wide view seaward, and easily concealed if desired, opened from the pirate's sleeping-room.

The place was reached by a succession of narrow stairs hewn in the face of the rocks; and at their foot, an armed pirate always stood upon guard.

The main room of the pirate's quarters were some twenty feet square. With the exception of a small Turkish rug in the center, the rocky floor was bare. The rest of the apartment, however, was furnished in the most costly manner.

The choicest treasures of every clime had been brought into service to satisfy the pirate's fastidious taste.

Maps, charts, and weapons of every description, from Malay kreese with its razor-like edge, to the more modern blade of civilization, were upon the walls.

The center of the apartment was occupied by a small handsomely carved table, while the rest of the furniture was in keeping with it.

From the main apartment two doors led to rooms adjoining.

Underneath the brightly colored rug was a small trap-door, leading by a secret staircase to the treasure cave below.

In those quarters no man of his crew ever ventured without an express command.

His followers were provided with a number of low huts on the open space behind the cliffs.

It was early in the morning. Seated at the table, now spread with a snowy cloth and resplendent in silver vessels, the pirate chief was quietly eating his breakfast. Close behind him stood a dwarf awaiting his master's orders.

Pedro Santillez seemed a man of thirty or thereabouts. A trifle above the medium height, he possessed a frame powerful in proportion. He was clothed in a rich suit of black velvet, ornamented with buttons of gold. Around his waist beneath the belt containing his weapons, was a knotted sash of heavy crimson silk which showed in rich contrast against its velvet background. In his belt were thrust a pair of handsomely mounted pistols.

His keen, heavy cutlass was missing, but in its place a small and keen poniard.

His black wavy hair was partly concealed by a close-fitting-skull cap matching his suit and surmounted by a large golden tassel.

A pair of heavy boots reaching to his knees, incased his feet.

"A fine-looking man," would be the general verdict on first glancing at his well-shaped features.

His actions, too, were easy and graceful like those of one accustomed to the best society. Still, a physiognomist, studying his face closely, would have distrusted those thin, bloodless lips and cat-like, uneasy eyes; and in truth his was a nature insensible to the finer emotions of the human heart. Selfishness and cruelty were the ruling passions of his life.

Having finished his meal, Santillez carelessly lit a cigar. Then he strolled over to his window and looked out.

A sail rounding the neighboring headland immediately attracted his eye. Snatching a telescope from its bracket, he gazed long and earnestly at the approaching craft. A cruel, vindictive smile spread over his face as he did so.

"So, ho!" he muttered, savagely, "my burly Truxillo has been in a fight with the schooner, it appears! My pretty 'Isabelle' has lost her main-topmast; and there's a couple of shot-holes in her canvas. But, never mind, my beauty, you shall be amply avenged for it all, never fear."

He touched a call-bell as he spoke, and instantly the dwarf appeared before him. Terribly misshapen, he possessed, nevertheless, a frame as powerful as that of a gorilla.

"Baba, my beauty," said the pirate chief, grimly, "go down and tell the men below to stand by to give the 'Isabelle' a hand in picking up her cable; and as soon as the schooner is secured, I wish Truxillo to come to me."

"Si, senor," responded the dwarf, as he hurried off to obey his master's orders.

Very impatiently, with a quick, cat-like tread, Santillez paced his apartment. Often he would stop to again criticize the schooner, now working her way into the channel.

At length the rattling of the blocks, as the sails were lowered, told him that the schooner was at anchor in her usual place.

A few moments afterward, the burly form of Truxillo was seen hobbling ashore with the aid of crutches.

"Ah, ha!" sneered the pirate, with a demoniac smile. "So it seems that my drunken lieutenant has received his own share of bad luck! Never mind, my man; it's only another item in the long list I've got against your name."

Truxillo slowly and laboriously made his way up the steep stairway.

At last, after many muttered curses at the pain the effort cost him, he reached the narrow ledge fronting the pirate's quarters and knocked at the door.

"Come in, Truxillo!" said the chief, in a hard, metallic tone. "You're rather a stranger to these parts. Let me see; I believe, three months since, you left us for a cruise. Lost a leg, too, it seems? Well, it might have been your neck just as well. Take a chair yonder, and let me hear how you have enjoyed yourself with my pretty schooner."

The words were spoken in a mock-humorous tone that foreboded mischief; and the lieutenant realized that his master was in one of his dangerous moods.

He waited sullenly for an opportunity to speak; but, still running on in that same strain, the chief continued:

"Seen in a bad blow, too, I suppose? I see the main-topmast is carried away. A great pity, too, for it was a shapely spar. By the way, I noticed a couple of patches in your canvas. They looked as if they might have been made with round-shot, but that can hardly be."

"What's the use of growling over bad luck when it can't be helped, senor?" retorted the late commander of the schooner.

"Bad luck, eh?" retorted the chief, with a dangerous curl of his thin lips that showed his gleaming white teeth. "Has it come to pass, then, that my pretty Isabelle has escaped so often under my charge only to begin it in your hands?"

"So it seems, senor," replied Truxillo, sullenly. "A man can only do his best and if luck is against him—why, that's the end of it."

"I don't like to hear of bad luck," replied the chief, with a wicked glitter in his dark eyes. "How did you lose that leg? Did you tumble down a hatchway in a drunken fit, or how?"

"If you'll only stop your chaffing I'll tell you all about it, senor," growled Truxillo. "The fact is, we overhauled several craft on the start without getting anything much worth our trouble. I didn't care to come back empty-handed. Yesterday afternoon we sighted a brig, which looked as if she might be worth the risk. As soon as it was dark we ran down to her with a gentle breeze. Afore they knew it, we had full possession of her deck. She was a trader from 'Rio' and in lookin' over her papers I spied the name of a woman passenger."

"You brought her along, of course. Where is she now?" asked the pirate, his scowl relaxing, somewhat.

"I tried to," was the reply, "but to tell the truth, I was interrupted by the mate who was a regular devil. He got clean away from three of us. We chased him on deck but he turned as quick as lightning and settled two men. Afore I could fire but one pistol, he had picked me up in his arms like a baby and flung me clean over the stern. The boys in the schooner pulled me out but not afore an infernal shark had grabbed my leg."

"So you came short by a foot," said the pirate, with a harsh laugh. "This is getting interesting, it seems; go ahead. A fine revenge you must have taken for all this."

"I would, if I had been given time," was the reply. "Just as I was getting ready to go back on the brig what should we see but a cruiser bearing down upon us."

"Where was your look-out?"

"On deck with the rest of the boys, I believe; at any rate, the first we knew the cruiser was close aboard."

"And you ran?"

"Not afore we had passed a keg of powder aboard the brig with a five-minutes fuse," replied Truxillo, growing nervous as he spoke.

CHAPTER VI.

PIRATE AGAINST PIRATE.

THE burly lieutenant knew that what was to come would anger the chief far more than anything he had yet told.

"You see, senor," he continued, "the brig's crew had retreated to the fo'castle and barred themselves in. The mate I was telling you of had got clear of our men, and diving into the cabin, shot the bolts. There wasn't time to smoke 'em out, so we just lighted the fuse and left."

"So all you gained by the attack was the loss of a keg of powder and the blowing up of the brig, it seems," snarled the chief. "And the woman went down with the vessel, of course. Was she old and ugly, as usual?"

"As pretty a craft as ever I laid eyes on, senor," replied Truxillo, his eyes glowing with the recollection of her beauty.

"Bad luck was with us all through the affair. We hadn't time to scuttle the craft as usual, and somehow or other, the powder didn't explode."

"What!" cried the chief, with a sudden start that made the lieutenant jump. He saw the dark storm gathering in his leader's face, and yet there was nothing left him but to make a clean breast of it all. So he proceeded to describe the chase and the manner in which he had at last evaded the enemy.

"That isn't all, senor," he added; "for that same night the crew laid a plan to kill me and seize the schooner."

The chief's eyes flashed lightning. "Why should they do that?" he asked.

"Well, you see, senor," began the lieutenant, uneasily, "I shot the man who bungled the job in blowing up the brig. It happened to be Pedillo, one of the two that pulled me out of the water. The crew seemed to think I ought to have spared him, for that, I believe."

"How did you find it out?"

"Through one of the crew, senor. He came to me and told all. I clapped the ringleaders in irons at once and locked 'em up. The fellow, John Frazer, that you've allowed so much liberty to, was at the head of it all. You see, the crew didn't suspect who had betrayed 'em, so they was sort of confused."

"John Frazer was the ringleader, you say?" asked the pirate chief, who had now recovered his composure.

"Yes, senor; I had a notion at first to string him up at once, but then I thought I'd better wait till I had seen you."

"Lucky you did," said the chief sternly, in tones of mingled scorn and passion. Then suddenly checking himself, he said, quietly:

"Go down and assemble the men on shore at once; then bring your prisoners ashore and wait till I come. I will join you as soon as possible."

With these words and an expressive glance toward the open door, the pirate chief closed the interview.

A very short time afterward he appeared in the pirates' quarters, where his coming had been awaited. On the left arm of the pirate chief, rested a long coil of snowy white cotton rope, light but strong. In the end of it was fixed a running noose.

Across a stunted palm tree standing close by, there hung a short, stout spar having a block affixed to one end.

"Up, now, and reeve our halliards!" exclaimed the pirate, tossing the coil to the man nearest him.

The prisoners, four of them, and still tightly bound, stood silently watching the proceedings.

John Frazer, the man who was to have been their leader, was as cool and collected as if he was only to be a witness of the scene. He, at least, was prepared to meet his death with the same brave front he had always shown.

As the long rope came twisting and squirming round to the ground, the pirate chief stepped in the midst of his followers. There were black looks gathering upon the faces of the pirates, as, with lowering brows, they watched the proceedings.

The pinioned men were watched with looks of covert sympathy. They looked like men who only awaited a leader to break out into open revolt—all of which did not escape the sharp eyes of Pedro Santillez.

Striding fearlessly among them, he held up his hand as a signal for silence.

"Men," said he, in deep, determined tones, "you all know that the late cruise of the Isabelle was a most unlucky one. Only a few paltry ounces of gold has been added to our treasure store, while, to offset that our gallant Isabelle has been battered up until she looks like an old drogher. But, as if that was not sufficient for one trip you must plot to get up a mutiny on board."

Darting a terrible glance upon the pinioned men, and from them to the dangling rope, he proceeded:

"I do not propose to be unjust, and hang a man without a hearing. John Frazer, you shall have the first privilege to explain your strange conduct."

The man addressed fixed his eyes quietly and calmly upon those of the pirate.

"If you hope to hear an excuse from me you will be disappointed," said he. "I only regret that we failed."

"You admit the fact then," said the pirate, with a sneer; "have you no defense?"

"Not a word that could influence your cruel heart, you monster," was the defiant reply.

"I have, though," said another of the gang, standing next to him; and very volubly he proceeded to narrate the cause of disaffection among them, and the particulars of Pedillo's death.

A low murmur of anger ran through the crowd as they listened, and many were the black looks bestowed upon the lieutenant standing by.

"It was a piece of ingratitude, I admit," said

the chief, sternly; "but even that was no excuse for mutiny."

Turning toward the remaining pirates, he said:

"Now, my brave lads, I shall make you the judges in this case. Shall you string up these men alone, for wishing to avenge your companion, or"—with a glance full of malediction on Truxillo—"shall we first run up the man whose drunken and careless management has been the cause of all the trouble?"

A cry of surprise and approval broke from the throats of the swarthy crowd.

The bull-dog face of the lieutenant presented a picture of rage and terror.

The cry broke into a roar.

"Hang the lieutenant, senor chief! Hang the lieutenant!"

"You hear the verdict, Truxillo," said the pirate, addressing him in tones of mock regret. "Your mates have heard the case and decided against you. Well, so be it. It will be only the end of your usual bad luck, you see."

The cowed villain made no reply to these taunts. His right hand slipped to his side. Then he quickly snatched a pistol from his belt. He raised the weapon to avenge himself upon the chief, who had really been instrumental in securing his death sentence.

But, the quick, keen eye of Pedro Santillez had noticed the stealthy movement. Quick as lightning, almost, his right hand described a circle in the air. There was a flashing of bright steel in the sunlight. The next instant the poniard of the chief, flying with deadly precision through the air, buried its point deep in the villain's wrist.

Truxillo dropped his pistol with a howl of rage and pain.

"Seize him, lads, before he tries any more tricks," said Santillez, coolly.

In another moment the doomed lieutenant was bound and helpless in their hands.

"Up with him," ordered the chief, in the same hard, cruel tones. "Careful, there, of that injured leg, though it will not long trouble him now."

Despite the terrible struggles of the villain, the fatal noose was slipped over his head and drawn tight.

With a fiendish yell, a dozen of the pirates grasped the other end and ran him up to the block, his body bringing up against it with a sharp jerk.

There were a few despairing struggles, a quiver of the massive limbs, and then the hardened scoundrel was dead.

The only pity was that his executioners who so richly deserved the same treatment, escaped the same fate.

Satisfied that life was extinct, Santillez directed the body to be lowered.

Once more the noose was readjusted in preparation for the next victim.

CHAPTER VII.

SANTILLEZ'S DARING GAME.

NOT one of the pirates but was certain that John Frazer would be the next man to pay the penalty for his rashness.

"Release all but John Frazer," commanded Santillez, sternly. "As for you," said he, to Frazer, "I have a word to say. You saved my life some two months ago, and I owe you something for that. Mutiny even among pirates deserves punishment by death. Still I am not the ungrateful dog that Truxillo was. A life for a life, says an old maxim, and I spare yours this time."

A cheer broke from the pirates' lips, for John Frazer's courage had now the sympathy of all.

"Remember," added Santillez, sternly, "we stand quits now. The first suspicious move on your part will be the signal for the death you have this time so narrowly escaped. Release him, men."

This order was obeyed with alacrity.

It looked like a most magnanimous act on the part of their bold leader. Little did they suspect that the crafty Santillez had decided upon that very result, the instant the lieutenant had finished his report.

As for the man, John Frazer, he took his release from death as quietly as he had prepared to meet it. Not a muscle of his face had changed throughout the whole terrible scene. As the cords dropped from his wrists, he gave the chief one undaunted glance and walked quietly away, without a word.

"Sancho," said the chief, turning to one of his men, "from this moment you are next in command. Ferdinand, I appoint you second lieutenant of our crew. Tell Carlos that my men are to have a double allowance of liquor, to-night. Ah, here he comes now. I wonder what brings him hither, in such haste?"

The pirates, who had begun to scatter, quickly re-gathered as they saw the man stationed on the look-out hurrying toward them.

Out of breath nearly, from his rapid haste, the fellow managed to gasp, as he hastily touched his hat:

"A vessel in the offing, senor chief, and she looks like the cruiser who chased us off Jamaica, two years ago."

"It's the same one that chased us last night, then," remarked one of the men, who had formed one of the Isabelle's crew.

"To your posts, every man!" ordered the chief. "I will go to the look-out at once and see if Carlos is right. Sancho, you will get ready the carronades on the cliff. We'll give yonder chap all the work he wants if he grows too inquisitive."

So saying, the pirate strode with rapid steps to his quarters on the cliff. Taking up his most powerful telescope, he leveled it at the sail visible in the distance.

"Full-rigged and carrying royal-masts," he mut-

ered savagely. "Can it be that the drunken scoundrel I have just hung has betrayed the character of the Isabelle in some of his carousals ashore? Yes, that is the Vixen, as I live! Curses on the Yankee! He is heading straight for the island! Well, then, if he insists upon it, we will give him a warm reception."

It was late in the afternoon before the distant sail approached near enough for her hull to be plainly visible from the island. The breeze was but a light one, consequently the cruiser was able to make but slow progress. Nearing the island, she fell off a few points, until her whole length was visible.

From his post of observation, the pirate saw that their glasses were leveled on the island, but Santillez's foresight had already provided for this emergency.

The vines trained over his window effectually concealed him.

As for the schooner, screened as she was behind the bold bluff, she was as effectually concealed as if she had not existed.

Neither was a trace of human habitation visible from the sea, while the pirate's crew had been ordered to remain out of sight.

The cruiser, however, acted as if she had resolved to investigate the island still more closely.

In a short time she went about again, now running a course parallel with the reefs beyond.

"He means to stand off and on until morning," muttered the pirate. "Well, if he does that, the chances are he will be far enough from power to harm us by that time. If I'm not mistaken in my reckoning, and the barometer is not a liar, there will be an old-fashioned hurricane in these parts before morning. Those reefs yonder would make a fine end of the reckless Yankee. By all the saints!" he added, suddenly, "she shall bleach her bones there, if it's in my power to make her!"

A sudden daring resolution had taken possession of the pirate chief.

Summoning Sancho to his side, he gave him a few hurried orders.

"Have the schooner's heavy canvas bent at once. Make everything secure on her decks, and be ready to slip the cable at a moment's notice. By the by, you can countermand the order for a double allowance to the gang, at present. We will need clear heads and steady hands for the work before us this night."

The new lieutenant had been conducted through the secret staircase. In turning to depart, he was about to pass out the other door.

"Stop! you fool!" cried the pirate, fiercely. "Don't you know that there's a dozen glasses watching this island, every moment? Take the secret stairway, by which you came, and caution the men again, not to show so much as a head to those Yankees yonder. Away with you at once."

The red sun sunk in the ocean with an angry glare. Far off in the horizon appeared a small cloud, slowly growing larger and ominous of mischief; then darkness closed upon the scene, with the cruiser still hovering near the island.

Already the schooner had been prepared for service. The sails, so recently reefed by his orders, were set when he reached her decks. Her bows swung with the tide, were already pointing toward the sea.

In a very few moments the cable was slipped that held her. Then she began to gather headway for her task.

Never before had the gallant schooner passed through that channel save by daylight.

It was dangerous even then; but doubly so in the darkness of the night.

Santillez himself seized the wheel.

With his black eyes seeming to pierce the darkness, he steered toward the opening.

The wind had been rising rapidly.

Already it was blowing in a manner suggestive of worse to come.

"Send the men aft," commanded Santillez quietly. In a few moments the crew were assembled before him.

"My brave men," said he, coolly, "you have seen the cruiser yonder, watching our island all day. She is still suspicious of the place for she seems to be waiting until to-morrow's sun to make a closer examination."

In spite of all our security, the Yankees number us two to one, so it would never do to give them a footing on the island. This is the third time yonder vessel has been on our track and it shall be the last. Before the morning dawns, this infernal Yankee shall be crushed to pieces on the reefs or our brave "Isabelle" shall herself go to the bottom. The ocean is not wide enough for both of us. Once for all it shall be settled between us. What say you, men?"

A hoarse cheer was his answer.

"Good! And now to your posts. Let no man flinch from his duty this night."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEA RACE.

The wind began to whistle ominously through the Isabelle's rigging as she gathered headway and rounded the cliff that shut her off from the sea. The darkness of the night was intense. It looked as if no mortal eye could pierce the gloom that surrounded them.

Standing aft, his muscular hands grasping the spokes of the wheel, the pirate chief stood resolutely to his dangerous task. His cat-like eyes seemed indeed able to pierce that intense darkness. Anon he would cast a swift glance over the side, as the hoarse voice of the breakers sounded nearer than usual.

Then a few swift turns of the wheel and they would glide safely by the dangerous obstacle.

Holding their very breath in fear, the crew stood firm to their posts. With all their confidence in their leader's nerve and skill, they felt that they were engaged in a most daring and desperate undertaking.

The swerving of a schooner's breadth from that narrow channel, would dash their light vessel like an eggshell on the treacherous rocks.

The silence of the scene was unbroken save by an occasional sharp order from their leader as he directed a pull on the sheets to turn her course.

At length after what seemed to be an endless half-hour to the waiting crew, they heard the roar of the breakers disappearing behind them.

They had run that dangerous gantlet in safety, thanks to the iron nerve of their leader.

"A narrow shave," he muttered coolly; "but a miss is as good as a mile. Now then, to see whether that cursed Truxillo has left his bad-luck as a legacy to the schooner. Slack off your sheets, men," he cried as he allowed the schooner's head to fall off a trifle.

"So then! Belay all! Now, off with that cover from the long-tom amidships! Get him ready to speak when I call on him! Look to the carronades forward, and see them in order."

The schooner began to dart ahead with increased speed in the rising wind. Buoyant as a bird she rose and fell as she dashed on.

Surrendering the wheel to his lieutenant, Sancho, the pirate chief strode forward to the bows. There he stood with his hand to his ear, straining forward to catch the slightest sound.

For some time he remained motionless.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, suddenly, as the quick rattle of sheaves in the blocks and the flapping of reef points against the canvas was borne to his ears.

"The 'Vixen' has gone about, I fancy. We'll be across her bows in ten minutes more. Is the long-tom ready, boys?"

"All ready, senior captain."

"Stand by to fire when I give the order, Ferdinand! We'll make that Yankee think he has stirred up a hornet's nest before we're through with him."

Still, nothing could be seen in the darkness to denote the presence of their enemy, which as a measure of precaution, had omitted to show her side-lights.

But, the sharp eyes of the pirate had seen more than his men. The faint glow of a lantern in the officers' wardroom glimmered through the port and revealed to Santillez's eyes the position of his enemy.

"Luff a little, Sancho," said he, striding aft. "There, steady you go!"

On rushed the saucy schooner in a direction calculated to carry her directly across the bows of her enemy.

One of the pirates, with a burning fuse concealed under his tarpaulin, stood by the breach of the long-tom amidships. "Ready!" cried Santillez, in the same low tone, as the wash of the water under the cruiser's bows became plainly audible to their ears.

"Fire!" he cried the next moment, as a dark object loomed up on their lee-beam.

There was a loud report and the iron messenger went crashing into the bulwarks of their enemy.

"Well done, boys," cried the pirate, exultingly. "Hard up your helm, Sancho! We'll give the Yankee another dose before he wakes up."

The schooner, careening over until her lee-rail swept the water, swung sharply on her keel and made for her antagonist again. But the pirate had mistaken the time it would take for the Yankee to "wake up."

Before the schooner could deliver her second attack and take to her heels, the keen, shrill whistle of a boatswain-pipe came to the pirate's ears.

"All hands to quarters! Clear away your guns!"

The next moment, the Yankee's ports dropped as if by magic and dozens of battle-lanterns gleamed through the darkness like so many fire-flies.

The pirate saw that he had made a mistake; but there was nothing left now but to carry out his manoeuvre and take his chances.

Again his long-tom spoke as they swept under the enemy's stern.

As she did so, the cruiser's head fell off until her broadside was brought to bear.

"Ready! Fire!" came the quick, sharp tones of her commander.

A dozen iron throats belched forth their missives of destruction at the same instant.

Unfortunately for the cruiser, the schooner had at that instant sunk into the hollow of a huge wave, and the iron messengers meant for her destruction, passed through her rigging with little damage.

By this time, the moon began to show her face through the scudding clouds, by which the two antagonists were enabled to get occasional glimpses of each other.

As it stood, the cruiser had the weather-gauge, a fact that her commander was not slow to recognize.

Contrary to their expectations the pirate wore short round on his heel, and with his sails wide spread, like a flying bird, he darted on with a free wind.

"What think you of that maneuver, Mr. Jones?" asked the commander of the Vixen, addressing his first-lieutenant, who stood beside him.

"It appears to me like a ruse of some kind, sir, replied the young man respectfully. "He must know that we can overhaul him before long with the wind free for us who carry the most canvas."

"The fellow is evidently prepared for hard work," averred Captain Clark, thoughtfully.

"I see he is reefed down as if he expected heavy weather, and I would not be surprised if he is right."

"I think so, too, sir," the young officer responded, quietly.

"Mr. Jones," remarked the captain, slowly, "if you were in command of this ship what would you do under the circumstances?"

"Do?" was the prompt reply, "I'd run that scoundrel to the bottom, or carry away every mast in the attempt."

"Bravo!" said the captain, with a quiet laugh.

"You're a man after my own heart, sir. Well, that is just the decision I came to from the moment that fellow showed his teeth. It bothers me, though," he added, "to see how he managed to track us so suddenly. We are evidently mistaken in the character of the island we've been watching all day. Even had a vessel been concealed behind those rocks, she could not have run out through those reefs in this darkness."

"It certainly does look impossible, replied the officer. "It strikes me, sir, he has got news of our movements through stopping at some of the islands we have lately visited. You know, the majority of these islanders are in sympathy and collusion with these scoundrels."

"I believe you, Mr. Jones," said the captain, confidently. "Some years ago I was in pursuit of this same sea rover. We had got upon his tracks after a great deal of trouble, and fancied we should soon have the pleasure of capturing him. We even knew his place of resort. Well, we ran down in that direction only to find that he had gathered his followers, packed up his treasures and left. We did get upon his track afterward, it is true, but he had too much lead for us to capture him. I learned later that a Spaniard on a neighboring island at whose house we had been well received, was the traitor who had betrayed our purpose to the buccaneer."

"Speaking of traitors, sir," responded the young officer, "reminds me that I have pretty good evidence there is one among the pirates."

"A traitor among the pirates?" repeated the captain, in amazement.

"Yes, sir."

"What grounds have you for making such a strange declaration?"

"Very good ones, indeed, sir. You remember those fellows tried to blow up the brig when we surprised them so suddenly?"

"Yes; but what has that got to do with your statement? I remember that we were the gainers by a keg of powder in that transaction," said Captain Clark, with an amused smile.

"Nothing, sir!" was the dry reply; "only I heartily wish that all the powder in the pirate's magazine was of the same quality."

"You awaken my Yankee curiosity, sir; please speak out at once and keep me no longer in suspense."

"Well, sir, in plain words, the keg of powder left to blow up the brig was in reality only a keg of black sand."

CHAPTER IX.

A DARE-DEVIL CHASE.

THE commander of the "Vixen" uttered a low whistle of surprise.

"How did you happen to make this discovery, Mr. Jones?" he asked.

"Well, sir, one of the men told me that the fuse had burned completely up before our second cutter reached the brig. It puzzled me some to see how it had failed to ignite the powder. Afterward I examined the keg and became convinced that it was really black sand. In order to assure myself that there could be no mistake, I took a small portion and touched a match to it. It failed to explode, and I afterward threw another small quantity in the cook's galley, with the same result."

"That is a very queer discovery," said Captain Clark, thoughtfully. "One thing is certain; those scoundrels are not given to playing practical jokes."

"I think, sir," remarked the lieutenant, "that they have a traitor on board; or, rather, some person who is trying to thwart them by every possible means. It must be some one of considerable influence also, or he would not get the opportunity to make such a substitution as that."

"Look!" cried the captain, once more glancing toward the schooner, "we're gaining rapidly on the rascals. Ah! the pirate is heading for the southern end of the island. It must be there is a passage somewhere through the reefs that he is acquainted with. If he gets into the open water beyond he will be very apt to slip through our fingers. Well, we will soon see whether he is able to trick us so easily."

The wind by this time had increased almost to a gale. The "Vixen's" masts bent under her heavy press of canvas, for, as yet, not a single reef had been taken. Her massive shrouds straightened out under the strain until they stood rigid as iron bars. Every moment it seemed as if something must give way under that terrible force. And still the commander of the Vixen watched the chase, his eyes resting occasionally on the straining masts with looks of anxiety.

All possible precautions had been duly taken. Preventer-braces and stays: chafing-wales to prevent wear on rigging, and every thing possible to guard against accident were long since in their places.

Rapidly the heavy cruiser was gaining upon her lighter-heeled but more cautious adversary. Four men now, instead of the usual two, stood by the heavy double wheel. Even then it was no easy matter to keep control of the rudder in that heavy wind and sea.

Suddenly a sound from aloft broke upon their ears like the report of a cannon. All eyes were turned upward only in time to see a mass of white disap-

pear in the darkness ahead, like a flying cloud. The foretopsail had been blown clear out of the bolt-ropes.

"Twill catch the pirate before we do, at that rate," said Captain Clark, grimly, "but we can afford a dozen such if we can only run down our game."

He then gave orders to get a new top-sail from the sail-room and bend it at once. In a very short time the empty yard was crowded with daring sailors. It was no child's play they were now called upon to accomplish. And yet, in twenty minutes' time a new top-sail had been sheeted home and mast-headed, by a hundred powerful arms.

"Every moment tells now," said Captain Clark, joyfully. "If it wasn't for deadening our headway, I'd be tempted to send him our compliments from the bow-gun. Never mind, though; let us once get near enough and we'll give him a dose that will be still more effective. Ah! there he goes, as I expected! He is heading his vessel through that narrow opening in yonder reef. Go for'ard, Mr. Jones, and watch his course if you can. The Vixen shall follow him through there or go to the bottom in the effort. It shall never be said that a Yankee has been outdone in daring by a scoundrelly pirate."

Even with a moderate breeze, and by daylight, the run through that long, winding, narrow passage was a most desperate undertaking.

It can be easily imagined, then, what nerves of steel were required to attempt it in the darkness.

Overhead, the wind howled and shrieked like demons clamoring for their prey, and the black clouds scudding across the heavens occasionally shutting out for a moment the moon's fitful light.

On dashed the pirate schooner, however, through the narrow opening, which, a short distance away, was scarcely perceptible.

Pedro Santillez had determined to run that gantlet, at all hazards. Too well he knew the determined character of the cruiser's commander behind him. It was on that same reckless disregard of danger that he had counted from the start. He knew that there were but seventeen feet of water in the passage at high tide, while the cruiser astern drew eighteen, at least. At that moment—by his calculation—the depth was not more than sixteen feet, scarcely sufficient to clear the keel of his own vessel. Should the cruiser then attempt to follow, she must certainly be dashed to pieces upon the cruel rocks.

Away like a bird, the pirate schooner dashed through the entrance. On either side of her, the sharp, black rocks reared their angry heads, while the surf breaking over them was thrown high in the air in crested foam.

Hardly a cable's length behind her came the gallant cruiser, her captain watching everything with a critical eye.

Far out on her bowsprit, wet to the skin with the dashing spray, the brave young lieutenant watched and noted every turn and twist of their slippery enemy.

On! on! rushed the frigate like a creature of life that seemed to have caught and shared the excitement of the chase. She, too, now has entered the narrowest part of the passage.

"Starboard!" cried the young officer, in clear, ringing words, which are passed from mouth to mouth to the helmsman, for no human voice can be heard far in that gale.

The huge ship changes her course a trifle, just in time to avoid a sharp section of the reef.

So narrow was the escape that a broad strip of paint was scraped in an instant from her painted sides.

"Steady!" and she is off again in the chase. And so quickly and surely came the orders from the look-out that the huge cruiser doubles and bends safely through the tortuous channel.

Far beyond, they could see the clear open sea, the point for which the pirate chief was heading. Standing by the wheel, the latter individual was keenly watching every movement of his determined adversary, and every moment he expected to see her dashed to pieces upon the rocks. But, minute after minute passed and yet the expected catastrophe came not.

"Curses on her luck!" he muttered. "She seems to bear a charmed life. May her helmsman's arm be paralyzed, but I fear she will run through, after all."

The pirate had left out one most important item in his calculation. He had not considered the fact that the strong gale was driving the waters in to an unusual depth.

His only hope now was that his adversary might make the least mistake; for the smallest deviation from that narrow channel meant instant destruction.

"At least we shall give him a pretty chase," he snarled as he glanced toward the open sea just ahead.

Still onward came the cruiser, her bows answering promptly to the rudder. Once only her keel grated sharply on the rocks beneath as she passed over an unusually shallow spot; but, never for an instant did she lose her flying headway.

The schooner's knife-like bows emerged into the open sea.

"Good!" muttered the pirate; "we are safely out of that scrape at last."

The next instant his helm was put hard down. As the Isabelle's head came up in the wind, the sheets were flattened and away she flew, careening over with the force of the gale and heading well up in the wind's eye.

CHAPTER X.

THE ILL-OMEN.

On, swept the Vixen, resistless as fate. She too made the opening safely and her danger was past.

"Now, my boys," roared Captain Clark, through

his trumpet, "round in the lee braces! Aloft, some of you, and—"

But before he could complete the sentence a gust of wind struck the devoted ship with the force of an avalanche.

Away went her canvas, torn into ribbons, and away went the fore-topmast broken short off at the cap!

The race was lost!

A cry of triumph, swallowed up in the shrieking storm, broke from the lips of the pirate's crew. Their own craft had heeled far over under that blast, but righted instantly and dashed gayly on.

There were heavy hearts on board the "Vixen" at that moment.

"That ends the chase, for this season," said Captain Clark, quietly. "How those scoundrels must enjoy this sight. Yonder they go, as saucy and defiant as ever, and I dare not even cast loose a gun in this heavy sea."

Under nothing but bare poles, the cruiser's head was put before the wind, while the crew were busily engaged in getting new sails bent on the topsail yards. Quietly and rapidly they worked at their task. Then the new canvas was close-reefed, the staysail set, and they once more headed up in the wind.

Captain Clark still held a faint hope that something might, meanwhile, happen to disable his opponent and give him a chance to overtake her.

The wreck of the foretopmast, hanging to leeward, was cut adrift, for it was impossible to save it then.

Sea after sea struck and broke over the cruiser's bows, but the ship was strong and stanch, and it did no other injury than drenching her crew. And still the wind increased in violence until they were at last compelled to take in the mizzen topsail, already closely reefed.

It was indeed a regular hurricane, such as the pirate had counted upon and prepared for.

The black clouds by this time had shut out all light, rendering his course impossible to be noted by the "Vixen."

The last the frigate saw of the schooner she was flying on as lightly as a bird. Then that pall of intense darkness was dropped on the scene.

"Pipe down the watch below!" shouted Captain Clark, when the last traces of the wreck had been cleared away. "Let the watch on deck examine the guns and see to it that they are securely lashed. Let the life-lines be stretched along the deck. We will be able to do no more with that rascal until we have run into port and repaired damages, I fear. The scoundrels are game to the backbone, that's certain. Who would have thought they would have dared to pitch into us in that lively manner?"

He passed his trumpet to the officer of the deck as he spoke, and, with a sigh of regret, descended the companion-way to his cabin.

Meanwhile the crew of the Isabelle were jubilant over their escape. Close-hauled on the wind, they knew that no square-rigged vessel could hope to catch her.

Pedro Santillez was alone disappointed with the result. The marvelous escape of the cruiser in running that narrow gantlet troubled him.

Notwithstanding the calamity that had afterward overtaken her, he looked upon it as an ill-omen.

True, his enemy was temporarily disabled from pursuit, but then, the broken spars could be replaced and then—

He ground his teeth in rage as he thought of what would then ensue. Any other man in his position would have at once resolved to leave the locality which had grown so warm, to continue his career where he would meet with less persistent enemies; but this pirate's blood was up and he stubbornly resolved to fight it out.

"No," he growled, "I'll beat that infernal Yankee yet, or go to the bottom in the attempt. At least," he added, as he descended into his cabin, "I can blow the schooner to atoms if the worst comes to the worst. It shall never be said that they captured her. If I must be conquered, I shall die a death befitting my name."

He glanced, as he spoke, toward the end of a fuse projecting through a hole in the cabin bulkhead.

Of all on board, Pedro Santillez alone knew that the other end of that fuse connected with the magazine, and there was sufficient powder therein to blow them all to atoms in the twinkling of an eye.

The thought seemed in a measure to calm his uneasy feelings. Going to his locker, he took out a brandy bottle, and tossed a huge bumper down his capacious throat. He was beginning to recover his confidence.

At that moment there was a tap at his door, and he turned to see the crafty face of his lieutenant Sancho, peering into the room.

"What now?" demanded the chief, gruffly.

"Pardon, senor," was the reply; "but one of the men has just been washed down in the lee-scuppers by the last heavy sea that struck us. We got him out as soon as possible, but he's badly hurt. Some of his ribs are mashed in, and I think his left arm is broken."

"What's all that to me, that you should trouble me about it?" demanded the pirate, in some irritation. "Couldn't you send Frazer to him at once, without disturbing me?"

"John Frazer, senor?"

"Certainly! Must I speak twice before you can get my words through your thick skull?"

"But, senor captain, it is impossible; the man is not on board."

A red flush of rage swept over the pirate's face. His eyes glittered with a dangerous light, but, controlling himself by an effort, he said, sharply:

"Surely, you must be mistaken, Sancho. I my-

self told you to see to it that every man except Baba should be on board this night, and you have never disobeyed me before."

"Nor did I this time, senor. John Frazer was on board when we raised our sails. I myself saw him while we were cutting the cable, and so did the rest of the crew."

"Then he must be here now, unless he has been washed overboard," said the pirate, decidedly; but, as the recollection of the individual's courage and daring came over his mind, he changed color.

What if John Frazer were at that moment engaged in some plan to disable the vessel, and throw her in the hands of their enemy? And there was the unguarded powder-magazine!

"Let the schooner be thoroughly searched at once," the pirate sternly ordered. "Not a place big enough for a rat must be missed. You will find him, never fear, and when you do, tie him securely, and bring him to me."

Sancho turned away to give the necessary orders, while the pirate chief hastily grasped the end of the protruding fuse, and drew it through into the cabin.

A dozen yards of it lay at his feet as he finished.

"I nearly forgot that," he muttered. "It would never do to have the men know what a jolly fate I have prepared for them if all goes wrong."

He threw the coil out of sight in his state-room, and sat expectantly waiting for the missing man to be brought before him.

A full hour passed slowly by, and the pirate was beginning to grow impatient. But he would not go on deck to inquire, and thus betray his anxiety. At last, the ugly face of Sancho reappeared.

He was alone.

"Where's your prisoner?" demanded the pirate angrily.

"Pardon, senor; but the man is not to be found. I'll stake my life he is not on board the schooner."

Yes, the mysterious individual known as John Frazer was missing.

Had he been washed overboard in the gale unnoticed, or what had become of him?

"Another ill-omen," thought the pirate as he swallowed a second glass of brandy to steady his nerves. Then he said: "You men are as blind as bats. I will look for him myself."

CHAPTER XI.

WAKING UP JOB ROGERS AGAIN.

FAR more uneasy than he cared to reveal, the pirate proceeded to carry out his purpose. As a matter of precaution he satisfied himself that his pistols were in order before starting. Then, concealing a poniard up his sleeve he proceeded with the search.

It was not such a very difficult task either, for the schooner had been unloaded of her late spoils. Only the usual water casks and provisions took up the room in the hold, together with the spare sails and rigging always carried. The space over the keel was taken up with heavy pigs of lead securely bolted down and serving as ballast.

Close by the cabin bulkhead, stood the magazine, built of heavy timbers and covered with sheet lead. It was closed by a peculiar lock and the key to it was in the pirate's own possession.

The heavy ribs of the schooner, plainly visible, offered no place of refuge.

So the search was fruitless.

"Who was the last man that saw him?" asked the pirate.

But all his keen questioning elicited was that Frazer had been seen just previous to the run from their retreat. There had been too much excitement since then to pay heed to who was around them and Frazer never was very sociable.

"He must have drowned himself then instead of caring to go to the bottom in our company, lads," said the pirate with a harsh laugh. "Well, I am glad we are well rid of him, anyhow."

The pirate returned to his cabin with a heavy scowl darkening his face. A thought flashed across his mind that perhaps the man had swum ashore at the last moment. But, even if that were possible the dwarf would discover him, and he could do no harm so long as the powerful dwarf was there to oppose him.

Gradually, however, he dismissed this theory as impossible, and settled down to the belief that the man had been washed overboard unnoticed.

Once more having recourse to the bottle, he threw himself on his bunk and was soon sleeping soundly.

At daylight the next morning no sign was to be seen of their late pursuer.

"So," muttered the pirate "he's concluded to haul off and repair damages, it seems. We shall have peace for a couple of weeks at least. It will take him fully that time to get such a spar as he needs. Meanwhile, Sancho, you can keep the schooner headed as she is. Tell the look-out to keep his eyes open. We will have plenty of time to pick up a few prizes and get back to the island before that Yankee can get after us again."

The gale had abated considerably and the wind was still going down. Stopping only long enough to shake out her reefs the schooner again dashed ahead.

Toward six bells (11 o'clock) in the forenoon, the look-out reported a sail ahead. The pirate snatched up his glass hurriedly.

"Broad in the bow as a tub," he muttered. "Well, who knows but that she may be worth our time! Been badly shaken up in last night's gale, too. Keep the schooner as she is. We'll take a closer look at him, anyhow."

The disabled vessel, most of her top-hamper carried away, was staggering slowly on under a light

spread of canvas, and within an hour her hull was plainly visible from the pirate's deck.

"Send all the men below but a half-dozen," Santillez ordered.

As he spoke he disappeared in the cabin. When he returned he was clad in the rough garb of an ordinary sea-captain.

Presently a flag fluttered out from the main-mast of the merchantmen. As it unfolded to the breeze it displayed the well-known Stars and Stripes, union down.

"Another Yankee, and he wants assistance, eh?" hissed the pirate, savagely. "Well, they owe us something for the run their cruiser gave us last night. Hoist their own colors, Sancho; I don't care to have them suspect us yet. You can lay our own flag where it will be ready when we want it!"

As the well-known ensign fluttered from the schooner's peak, a gun was fired to windward from the brig in recognition.

"So they are armed, too, it seems?" growled the pirate. "They must have something, then, worth our trouble. They shouldn't waste their powder so carelessly, though, for they'll need it pretty soon."

While he was speaking, Sancho was surveying the vessel through the glass.

"Pardon, senor," said he, "but that's the same craft we boarded when the cruiser came down on us so suddenly."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Ay, senor, that I am. I noted the fellow's rig particularly."

"Then they'll recognize us and give us a lively fight."

"No, senor, we boarded her in the darkness. They had no chance to notice us before we were on them."

"So," muttered the pirate, his eyes gleaming with a new light. "I am in luck after all, it seems. Truxillo told me that she carried a heavy treasure, and then there's that lovely beauty he was telling about thrown in. The last petticoat that fell in my hands was an old crone as homely as Satan. It was unfortunate for her, for she had to walk the plank with the rest of them. Well, I shall soon see if the dead rascal was right in his description."

The brig, meanwhile, had hove to and was waiting for the schooner's arrival.

Captain Zeke was standing aft, watching the schooner through his glass.

"A handsome craft," he exclaimed, admiringly. "I'll bet a dollar against a sixpence she's Baltimore built."

"Looks so to me, too," responded Job Rogers.

Less than a quarter of a mile intervened between the two vessels now. Suddenly the Stars and Stripes dropped from the schooner's mast, and the next instant the black flag shot up in its place!

"Pirates again!" excitedly exclaimed Captain Zeke, but in a moment he had regained his coolness.

"Serve out the arms at once, Job," was his quick order, "and pass up the shot for our gun forward. Lose no time, for that feller is coming fast. Fight like true Yankees, boys, for yonder rascal gives no quarter. It's death to every man of us if they take the brig."

No need of further urging. As rapidly as possible the forward gun was loaded.

"I'll take keer of this shootin'-iron, boys," answered the mate, running his eye over the sights as he spoke. "Give a pull on that port tackle! There, stand back!"

Grasping a handspike he lowered the breech until he had gained the necessary elevation.

His sharp gray eyes once more ran over the sights and then he applied the match. There was a flash and a stunning report, followed by a puff of smoke.

As the wind swept the latter away all eyes were fixed upon the schooner.

"Good shot!" cried Captain Zeke, approvingly. "You've knocked his jib-boom clear to thunder, Mr. Rogers! Give him another dose of the same."

In fact the shot had carried away most of the pirate's head-gear and considerably impeded his progress.

Santillez was not slow to return the compliment from his long-tom amidships, but the ball went wide of the mark.

Now that the pirate had thrown off his mask, his decks were filled with villainous faces.

"There's a better mark for you," exclaimed Captain Zeke, as the schooner fell off a couple of points. "Give 'em Hail Columby this time!"

"Here she goes, then," was the reply, as the gun was again discharged.

This time Job was still more fortunate in his aim, for the shot raked across the pirate's fore-castle, making a huge breach in her bulwarks and sending death to a half dozen pirates who were engaged in repairing damages.

Still the schooner kept steadily on with grim determination, while again her gun spoke—this time sending its shot across the brig's decks but injuring none of her crew.

"Wait a bit, my hearties," shouted the mate, cheerfully. "we'll give you another dose."

Bang! went the gun as he spoke and a roar of delight broke from the brig's crew, for that last shot had struck the carriage of the long-tom, knocking it to splinters and killing the man who was at that moment about to apply the match.

"Hurrah!" cried Captain Zeke; "a few more doses like that and I fancy that chap will feel like dropping us as he would a hot potato."

But, Captain Zeke understood not the determined character of the man he had to deal with. The pirate kept on as unconcerned as if nothing had happened.

"Boarders to your places!" was shouted from his

deck and back before the brave mate could again bring his weapon to bear, the sharp bows of the pirate schooner grated against the brig's side.

With a fiendish yell, the pirates swarmed on the New Englander's decks.

Desperate indeed was the odds against the Yankee crew.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NIGHT PROWLER.

WHAT had become of the mysterious man whose disappearance had caused the pirate no little uneasiness?

Sancho had spoken the truth when he declared he had been seen on board the schooner at the moment of her departure; but, that was before the vessel had begun to gather headway for her run through the channel. No eye was upon John Frazer as he quietly lowered himself over the bows, and silently swam away in the darkness.

In the excitement of the danger ahead and surrounded by darkness his absence passed unnoticed. He had at last eluded his watchful enemies.

Before the schooner had rounded the cliff and entered the channel, he had clambered up the sloping beach and disappeared.

"So much gained, at least," he said, in deep satisfaction. "I had almost begun to fear that I should never be able to evade their suspicious eyes. Oh, that the vengeance of Heaven might overtake those wretches and scatter their bones upon the reefs yonder! Must I be compelled to drag out a weary existence in this horrible spot while my friends mourn for me as lost? No. Heaven is merciful! There must be some means by which I may yet outwit my foes."

As he spoke, he walked slowly on to the foot of the staircase leading to the pirate's quarters.

He was about to ascend, when he suddenly paused with the remark:

"No, I must not take unnecessary risk. I forget that I am not yet the sole inhabitant of this island. The dwarf still remains to keep guard over his master's treasures. Well, I shall have to be doubly cautious in my movements until he is rendered harmless, that is all."

He passed around the foot of the rock to that part of the cliff facing the sea. Proceeding but a short distance, he again paused. It was intensely dark, yet he acted like a man who understood thoroughly what he was in search of.

"This is the spot from which I have seen the dwarf emerge when he fancied no one was watching his movements. There must be a secret spring about here somewhere, and now to find it."

To all outward appearances, however, there was no sign of a door. All before him was apparently the solid face of the cliff. Stooping down, he began carefully groping over the surface. It was a good half-hour before he found anything to reward his search.

Finally, his hand rested upon a small iron knob, almost concealed by the rank sea-grass that lined the shore at that point. Pressing his foot upon this, a small section of the rock slid back, followed by a rush of cold air from within.

The space thus revealed to him seemed scarcely large enough to admit a human body; but, stooping down, with much exertion he forced his way through the aperture.

As he did so, the door slid back into its place with a sharp click.

"It is lucky I thought to provide myself with a candle," said the man, quietly, as he produced it from his pocket. This, after a few trials, he succeeded in lighting, carefully shielding it with his hand from sudden draughts.

He found himself in a long and very narrow passageway. The marks still plainly visible upon its rugged sides showed that it was the work of man.

With cautious steps he proceeded until he found his further passage barred by the solid rock. A careful search for hidden doors failed to reveal any.

"Am I to be baffled at the very outset?" he said, sadly, as he slowly retraced his steps, carefully examining the walls on either hand.

Presently he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. He had solved the mystery.

On one side of the wall were a number of niches cut in the rock and barely sufficient for a foot-hold.

Placing his feet in these, and bracing his back against the opposite wall, he slowly ascended, and emerged at length upon a narrow shelving rock.

Another narrow passage led from this; but, unlike the other, this was a natural cleft in the rock.

Passing through this a distance of about fifteen feet, he found his further advance barred by another door; but found the spring without difficulty and pushed it open.

A surprise was in store for him.

He found himself in a small apartment nearly filled by a bed, upon which lay the huge, misshapen body of the dwarf! He was soundly sleeping.

Shutting the door behind him as lightly as possible, to avoid disturbing the sleeper, the man passed through another door and left him.

"Baba sleeps unusually sound to-night," he muttered, softly. "I little thought that I would stumble upon him thus; but, all the better for me—and him. So long as he sleeps we shall not quarrel. He evidently believes that he is the sole inhabitant of the island to thus relax his usual vigilance."

The room which John Frazer had entered was the pirate's main apartment, already fully described.

On the table lay a number of papers thrown carelessly down. They were the same ones brought in by Truxillo when he made the report of his bad luck which afterward proved his death.

John Frazer stuck his candle into the neck of an empty champagne bottle upon the table. Then he

stepped to a carved swinging book-rack and carefully examined the volumes it contained. A pleased smile spread over his face as he selected a small volume whose sides were covered with sheet lead.

Glancing at the title he read: "United States Navy Signals."

The volume was thus bound to insure its sinking if thrown overboard to escape the enemy's hands.

"Good!" exclaimed John Frazer, coolly. "I had begun to fear that I might be unable to find this, after all. I wonder how he managed to secure two copies; for I know there is one on board the schooner. Pedro Santillez must consider his quarters very safe from intrusion at all events, or he would not allow such valuables to lie around so loosely. Now, then, for pen, ink and paper."

The required articles were very soon found and placed upon the table.

Drawing up a chair beside them, John Frazer sat down.

He was careful, however, in doing so, to choose a position giving him full view of the door leading from the dwarf's bedroom. Cautious to a degree, he also carefully examined the pistol which he took from the wall, and laid it down upon the table within easy reach of his hand.

Then, opening the book, he began rapidly to copy the signals from its pages.

"Help!" he remarked, thoughtfully, as he jotted down the corresponding number. "I'll need that signal, by all means. I wonder whether I will be as lucky with the next? Let me see now. P—1— Ah, here I have it, sure enough! Pirates—No. 734. There, I have that down. Those two signals will be all-sufficient for my purpose. Even if I should succeed in my intention during the pirates' absence, it will be no easy matter for a strange vessel to find her way through the channel. However, I'll see some way to get over the difficulty if that emergency should arise."

"The next thing on the programme is to hunt up some bunting with which to make the necessary signals. I wish there was some way to barricade Baba's door," he added, eying it distrustfully as he spoke. "This place seems to be full of traps on every hand. The first thing I know, I may find myself caught in one, and then my long-looked-for opportunity will be thrown away. It would have been an easy matter to have ended the dwarf's career forever."

Many a man in John Frazer's place would have done so as a measure of self-defense; but the mysterious and daring individual was repugnant to taking life if it could be avoided. He glanced at the door again, but there was no bolt from the side to ward him.

"Never mind; I must run the chances, I suppose," said he, coolly, as he again picked up the candle.

He opened another door, leading to the pirate's bedchamber.

"A pretty nest for such a scoundrel," said he, quietly, as he surveyed the handsome bedstead, with its rich silken hangings; "it is about as appropriate as putting a hyena in a church pew."

On every hand were scattered treasures and knick-knacks of immense value, thrown down in a state of indescribable confusion.

In one corner of the room stood a small ebony table, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Lying upon it was a small, handsomely-mounted pistol.

John Frazer picked this up, and satisfied himself that it was loaded before thrusting it in his pocket.

Then, hearing a sudden noise, he wheeled quickly around and cocked the weapon.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE UNWILLING SLEEPER.

HIS alarm, however, was groundless. The dwarf had started up in his sleep, but that was all.

The articles John Frazer was in search of were not in that room, as he soon discovered. Satisfied of this fact, he retraced his steps to the larger apartment. Two more doors were opened, but they proved to be closets.

"Strange," muttered the searcher, peering thoughtfully around. "I know that there is an entrance to the treasure from this spot, if I can but find it."

The Turkish rug in the center of the floor caught his attention. He pulled it hastily aside; and there before him lay the secret to the passage—a small trap-door let into the floor.

Grasping an iron ring secured in its face, he threw it open. Holding down his light, he could see a flight of steps leading downward.

Very cautiously the man began his descent. There was no telling what pitfalls might lie concealed before him. At the foot of the stairs he was confronted by an iron door, which was closed with heavy bolts from the inside.

It was but the work of a moment to slip these back. The door swung open, giving him ingress to a large roomy cavern, that was half-filled with boxes and bales of costly goods, for the pirates never troubled themselves with anything but the choicest of what fell into their hands.

After a short search, John Frazer came across a number of rolls of various-colored bunting. With the aid of his knife, he cut off such a quantity of each as he thought would suffice his purpose, and bundling them together, he prepared to return to the apartment above.

Fortunately, he had taken the precaution to shoot out the bolts of the door by which he had entered.

We say fortunately, for it was built in such a manner as not to be discernible from the solid rock of the cave when it closed.

Passing through, he secured the door as he found it and ascended again to the room above. Every-

thing there was as quiet as when he had left it, but a few minutes before.

Placing his ear to the door leading to the dwarf's room, he listened intently. A deep, regular breathing showed him that Baba was still soundly sleeping. Satisfied on this point, he again seated himself at the table. The papers lying scattered upon it caught his attention.

"Ship's papers," he muttered. "This is part of the result of Truxillo's cruise, I suppose."

He picked them up, one after the other, and glanced over their contents.

"The last clew that exists of their fate," said he, sadly. "I must take a note of these vessels' names in case it might some time serve to clear up the mystery of their fate. 'Wrecked at sea,' will be the general verdict when we fail to arrive. Ah! how little will they suspect the horrible truth that they have fallen victims to the cruel hands of the 'terror of the seas.' Could I have succeeded in my plan to capture the fleet Isabelle, I should very soon have found a way to bring justice upon the heels of this monster. Surely, some power higher than his own must have put it into his heart to save my life when he was about to have me executed. As for his pretended feeling of gratitude for saving his life, he is incapable of such a feeling. Well, while life remains I shall continue to hope. If I must perish, after all, I will die the easier for knowing that I have left no means untried to thwart him in his plans. Little did any of them suspect why that powder-keg failed to blow up the brig."

While thus musing, he had been engaged in jotting down the names and destinations of the fated vessels.

As he slowly unfolded another document, his face turned ashy pale. A sharp cry of surprise and pain broke from his lips. It was the manifest of the brig, Nancy Jones.

In answer to that ringing cry the door before him flew open, and the face of the dwarf, lit up with an expression of demoniac rage and surprise, confronted him.

The long, sinewy fingers were clutching the air convulsively, and the body crouched for the fatal spring.

Unfortunately for John Frazer, his usual self-command seemed swept away for the moment by the terrible shock he seemed to have received that moment; but only for a single instant did his wonderful presence of mind desert him. The next, he was the same cool, quiet individual we have seen before.

The misshapen dwarf looked like an enraged wild beast whose lair had been invaded. His eyes burned like coals, and a hoarse, savage cry issued from between his clenched teeth.

John Frazer rose slowly to his feet, his eyes glowing with a deep, peculiar light. They fixed themselves full upon the fiendish face of the dwarf.

As the lion-tamer keeps his beasts in subjection by the magnetic power of a deep, unflinching gaze, so did this man seem to bring the human brute before him into subjection. A strange thrill shot through every nerve and fiber of the dwarf's body. His furious looks began slowly to disappear, leaving a blank, expressionless stare upon his hideous features. A mysterious power was acting upon his savage nature, and he was compelled to submit to a master.

Still standing quiet and unmoved, John Frazer began making slow, graceful passes in the air. A quivering suddenly seized upon the frame of the dwarf.

Like a fascinated animal, his eyes were now fixed in a stony stare upon those of the master before him. His body had become as rigid as iron—the very impersonation of petrified rage.

"Sleep!" cried John Frazer, in a deep, commanding tone.

The rigidity of the dwarf's body slowly relaxed; and in a moment more he sunk unconscious to the floor, his eyes still wide open and fixed upon vacancy.

John Frazer stepped forward and took the dwarf's hand in his own.

"The Isabelle!" he cried, in clear, ringing tones.

"Follow her, slave, and describe her movements."

A shiver passed through the dwarf's frame, but he answered, the words coming from his lips in sharp, jerky sentences as if torn from his lips against his will.

"I see—her—now, but the—darkness it is great—" he said, with an effort.

The mysterious man made a few more imperative passes over the dwarf's body.

"You must see!" he said, sternly. "What make you out now?"

"They are—sighting—the long-tom amidships—" came in spasmodic jerks from his lips. "Ah, there is a ship on her lee beam."

The words seemed to come easier now; for the sleeper seemed to have caught the excitement of the scene he was describing.

"What now, slave?"

"They have fired the gun— There are lights flashing on the ship's decks— She answers with a broadside— Perdition! it is a ship of war and the schooner flies."

"Proceed!" cried John Frazer, impatiently, his heart beating high with hope.

Slower now and at long intervals the words dropped from the dwarf's lips.

"The ship is in chase—she seems to fly. Ah! the schooner is headed for the lower reefs—she will take the passage. Now she has entered."

"Can it be that the scoundrel is fated to escape justice again?" muttered John Frazer, under his breath.

He stooped to listen again for the dwarf was speaking once more.

"The ship is still in pursuit— Ah, she intends to

try the channel, too. Good! she will be dashed to pieces on the rocks! Furies! no. She has made the run safely, and is in deep water again.—Crash! what was that!—The full force of the hurricane has struck her.—There goes her fore-topmast over the side!—She loses headway! The Isabelle is flying off in the darkness. My master has triumphed again."

CHAPTER XIV. THE WILL-SLAVE.

A GHASTLY pallor began to overspread the face of the dwarf. The terrible strain upon his newly-used powers was beginning to tell.

John Frazer read those signs with a practiced eye. Again his hand moved in those passes as he released the subject from the trance and said sternly, "Awake!"

Like a man suddenly roused from a sound slumber, the dwarf stirred uneasily and opening his eyes sat up with a confused air.

"What has—" he began, then his eyes fell upon the silent form of the man beside him and he trembled violently.

He remembered nothing of the scene he had been so lately describing. Still he realized that he had been overcome in some mysterious way.

Ignorant to the lowest degree, he was correspondingly superstitious. A look of undisguised terror passed over his evil face. There was a gurgling, choking cry. He sprang to his feet only to fall back, the next moment, his body writhing in terrible convulsions.

"Bad!" muttered the mysterious man; "I did not mean to punish the wretch thus. He possesses less will-power than I thought."

He sprang to one of the closets as he spoke and glanced in.

"Ah, I am in luck!" he exclaimed, taking from a shelf, a small and handsome case. Setting it down upon the table, he threw open the lid and hastily lifting the bottles, glanced at their labels.

Selecting one of these and a small horn spoon, he hastily poured out a few drops as he approached the dwarf, still writhing in agony before him.

The sufferer presented a terrible appearance. From between his tightly clenched teeth, issued a mass of bloody froth.

John Frazer looked unusually grave as he knelt by the sufferer's side.

"Horrible!" he cried in deep pity, as his eyes took in the whole truth.

Yes it was horrible.

In one of his spasms, the dwarf had caught his tongue between his teeth and actually had bitten it in twain.

Kneeling by his head, his every look tinged with regret, and pity, John Frazer—in an interval of relief—succeeded in pouring the liquid down the throat of the tortured creature.

It acted like magic.

In a few minutes more the stiffened limbs began to relax their tension.

"Be quiet now, slave!" ordered the man sternly, as he saw that the dwarf once more recognized him. "Listen to me. You have bitten off your tongue in your unlucky fit. Unless you keep very quiet and allow me to do what I can to relieve you, you will surely bleed to death. Do you understand me?"

Sitting up and spitting out the blood which filled his mouth, the dwarf uttered a guttural sound of assent.

John Frazer once more had recourse to the medicine-chest. In a short time his skill had succeeded in stanching the flow of blood.

"Now, Baba!" said he slowly and impressively, "from this moment you are my slave. No secret of your heart can be hidden from my knowledge. You are thinking now of revenge upon me. Dare to move a hand and I will strike you dead as quickly as the forked lightning shoots from the skies."

The dwarf turned pale at these words, and a look of terror swept over his face.

Right well had the man before him read what was gathering in his evil heart. He was not slow to follow up his advantage.

"So long as you obey me implicitly you shall remain unharmed," he continued. "Attempt any act against my life though and you shall die. Now to your room and let no living mortal know what your eyes have seen."

The dwarf rose slowly to his feet like a man weak from a long illness. He turned to reach his room, only a half-dozen steps away; but, ere he reached it, and while his back was still turned toward the mysterious man, the latter suddenly made a sweeping downward gesture. Not a word did he utter, yet the dwarf was arrested as suddenly as if stricken by a thunderbolt.

For a full moment he remained there, as motionless as a statue.

Then, with another quiet move of his hand, John Frazer released him and said: "Go!" It was enough. Fear lent strength to the limbs of the dwarf. He leaped into the room at one bound, and slammed the door behind him.

"I guess he will not dare to attempt any tricks upon me after that," said John Frazer, lightly, and with an air of confident assurance. Then in a musing tone he added: "What a terrible power human magnetism may become when properly handled. I never thought of it as a weapon against the dwarf until I saw by his eye that he was a good subject. Much amusement have I caused in the past by the exhibition of my power; but, never did I imagine that it would one day answer me such a good purpose. I wish Baba, though, were a better clairvoyant," he added, thoughtfully, as he proceeded to return the medicine-chest to its place, and again seated himself at the table.

"Had he possessed more vital power, I might have

learned more of this cruiser; but he will take another twenty-four hours at least to recover from his exhaustion. The ship he described must be the same cruiser that has been watching the island today. Ah, I begin to see through it now. That daring attack upon her was made to draw her on in pursuit.

"Santillez must have hoped that his enemy would follow his daring lead and be dashed to pieces on the reefs. But, Providence has thwarted him in his wicked design, and for once the pirate has made a mistake. After his late narrow escape, he will be disposed to give the island a wide berth, for a few days at least. It remains to be seen yet whether the cruiser will return to examine the island, or run off to repair the damage she had received. May Heaven guide her footsteps here, is my earnest prayer!"

His head dropped upon his hands and he remained for a moment in silence.

Suddenly he raised up and his eyes fell upon the paper which had caused him such trepidation.

"Ah, my brave friend, Captain Jones," he said, sadly, "little did you or I dream how short was the distance that separated us in your moment of peril! Truly you escaped the hands of your enemy as if by a miracle. But I am losing valuable time," he exclaimed, starting up suddenly. "I must carry out my plans at once if I would succeed."

Making a quiet pass in the direction of the dwarf's room, he said in strong terms:

"Slave! you are wanted!"

The next instant, the pallid face of the dwarf appeared in the doorway.

"Bring me sewing materials at once!" commanded John Frazer.

Like a figure impelled by hidden mechanism, the dwarf obeyed. Entering the pirate's sleeping-room, he soon returned with a dainty work-basket, which spoke more eloquently than words of some fair victim.

As he sat it down upon the table, his master said, quietly:

"You may go, now, and sleep. I will summon you when I need you.—I shall have a treasure in that fellow, hereafter," he mused as the dwarf disappeared. "I'm sorry the poor wretch has lost his power of speech, but that was no fault of mine. It may in the end prove of great advantage to me. Ignorant as he is, he will be unable to communicate what has happened to his master, should I fail. It looks like the finger of an overruling Providence. Ah, could I but use the powers I possess to read the future as I do the past and present; but, alas, that is impossible!"

CHAPTER XV. THE PIRATE'S CAPTIVE.

NOBLY indeed did the Yankee crew rally to defend their lives. At the head of his men, the daring pirate leaped upon the brig's deck. As he did so, a slash from a cutlass, in the hands of Captain Zeke, laid his right cheek open to the bone. Point-blank the pirate fired his pistol at his antagonist.

Shot through the shoulder, the brave captain dropped like a log to the deck, while over his fallen body rushed the advancing pirates.

"Into them, men!" roared Santillez, fiercely. "Let not a man escape you! Death to them all!"

The crew of the brig had gathered near the mainmast as the pirates clambered over the side.

Slowly, and fighting with desperate determination against such overwhelming odds, they retreated step by step to the port side of the quarter-deck. Cut and wounded unto death, as some of them were, they still kept their courageous front to their enemies. But, it was fighting against fate; they must be compelled to give in at last.

Just at the critical moment when all hope seemed to have fled from their hearts, a voice from the bow thrilled them like an electric shock:

"Death to all pirates!"

Clear and distinct rung out that stern cry. Santillez flashed his eagle eye in the direction of the sound.

Even his bull-dog courage and nerves of steel faltered at the sight which met his eyes.

"Flat on your faces, men!" he managed to gasp, dropping as he spoke.

His words came too late for many of his hardened wretches to take in their meaning.

It was indeed a sight to appall the stoutest heart. The brave mate was standing by the bow-gun loaded to the muzzle with grape-shot.

A smile of avenging triumph rested upon his bronzed features as his right hand applied the match to his terrible weapon.

Before half the pirates could obey their leader's warning, a tremendous report shook the brig from stem to stern, and as the smoke lifted, a sickening sight was revealed. Nearly half of the pirate's crew had been blown to atoms. Only those who had heeded their leader's sudden warning escaped.

Like an enraged tiger, Santillez sprang to his feet.

"Follow me, lads!" he shouted.

The crew of the brig, prepared for that terrible catastrophe, had sprung to the opposite side of the deck at the sound of that warning from the mate's lips, and escaped unharmed.

We say crew, but there were only four men left of their number.

Two of them went down before the pirate's terrific onslaught. The others were literally swept to the deck and trampled under the feet of his followers.

Straight for that terrible gun they rushed, and with good need, for brave Job Rogers was at that moment hurriedly ramming home another cartridge. He stooped to lift another round of grape, when he saw that he was too late.

Already the pirate chief was within six feet of

him, his pistol raised to fire. Ducking his head to avoid the expected shot, the mate snatched up the match and applied it.

It was only a blank charge it was true, but it served to disconcert his enemies for a moment.

A dozen pistol-bullets whistled around him at the same instant. Santillez's aim had been truer than the rest. His bullet struck the brave sailor full in the breast.

"All is lost!" he gasped.

With one last superhuman effort, he staggered to the rail, and threw himself headforemost into the sea.

Better, at least, death from such a source than slow torture at the hands of his enemies.

The smoke of that last discharge hid his movement from the pirates' eyes.

Instinctively they guessed the truth. A dozen devilish faces peered over the rail, ready to finish their victim if he still showed signs of life. But the deep waters beneath gave no sign of the victim they had swallowed up in their depths.

The form of the stricken man rose no more to the surface.

"He's gone to Davy Jones's locker at last!" exclaimed the pirate chief, with a savage oath. "What very devils these Yankees become when their temper is up! Ah! if I had but fifty such men under me, I would fear nothing."

"Well, boys," added the pirate, as he coolly wiped his reeking blade upon the sleeve of his shirt, "we have had a harder fight than I expected to take the brig. Perdition seize me; but I don't remember to have ever been in a tighter spot in my life. I gave myself up for gone when I saw that gun covering us and that cool Yankee applying the match. Luck is with us, after all, you see. We've lost half of our brave boys; but, there'll be the fewer of us to divide the treasure among."

Well did the crafty leader understand how best to reconcile his men to what had happened. A grim look of satisfaction swept over the face of the crew at his words.

Then, like a flash, there came to the pirate's mind the remembrance of the woman his lieutenant had spoken of. A demoniac smile of triumph shot across his face as he wiped the blood from his wounded cheek.

"Stay on deck all of you!" said he, addressing his men. "If any of the brig's crew are still alive, you can pass a cord around their arms; but do them no harm. I have a fate in store for them worse than death. Sancho, you will see to it that a keg of powder is placed in the main hatchway. If there is anything in the hold particularly valuable, you can pass it over to the schooner's decks."

Turning on his heel as he concluded, the pirate strode aft to the brig's cabin, and disappeared.

"Now to have a peep at the pretty bird in her cage," he muttered. "It's caused me no little trouble to secure her."

Descending the companion-way, his eagle eye took in everything at a glance.

The victim he was looking for was not there.

"Could it be possible," he asked himself, "that the woman had thrown herself into the sea to escape his hands?"

But the look of chagrin accompanying it speedily vanished. His eye had noticed the door leading to the forward cabin. With a quick stride he laid his hand upon the knob and threw it open.

The sight that greeted his eyes was sufficient to have moved the heart of a demon. Kneeling prayerfully before him, her right hand raised appealingly to Heaven, the other hand thrown protectingly around the waist of a lovely boy, was the object of the pirate's search.

No thrill of pity crossed the flinty heart of the wretch as he gazed on the scene. No; only a look of gloating triumph that he had gained so rich a prize.

She started up at his entrance, her beautiful face turned pleadingly upon him in a look of supplication more eloquent than words.

"Spare us! in Heaven's name, spare us!" she cried.

"Nobody shall harm a hair of your head, my beauty," replied the pirate, with a glance that made her shudder. "Well can I afford to lose half my crew to gain such a prize as you."

"Have you no grain of pity in your heart?" cried the woman, pleadingly.

The pirate interrupted her with the coarse remark:

"Ay, my lass, I've plenty of heart when there's such dainty craft as you to be had for the taking. Pity? Ay, I pity you too much to send you to the bottom in this old hulk. You shall be my own sweet lass; never fear. You have still many years of life before you yet, if you but make the best of it."

A look of fixed, terrible despair crept into the woman's eyes at those fearful words.

"All is lost!" she cried. "Father in Heaven, forgive me for this act!"

CHAPTER XVI.

LOOKING DEATH IN THE FACE.

As the woman uttered those despairing words, she snatched a keen stiletto from the folds of her dress.

Another moment and she would have accomplished her purpose, but with one bound the stalwart pirate sprung forward and wrested the weapon from her grasp, cutting his fingers badly in the effort.

"Not so fast, my pretty bird!" he cried, angrily; "what are you about?"

"I would take the life of myself and child," she replied, bravely, "rather than accept your mercy."

A heart-broken sigh escaped her as she murmured: "It is Heaven's will that I should fall."

"Take my advice and don't try any more such foolish tricks," said the pirate, with a wicked glitter in his eyes. "I am the master, now, and you are to do as I please. There'll be time enough for that when—"

He was about to add, when he was tired of her company, but he suddenly checked the words.

"And now," he added, "you are to employ your time in picking up such things as you think you will need. You will have fifteen minutes given you for that purpose. It will take me that time to gather up what spoils there are in the after-cabin. No tricks, though"—with a look full of savage menace—"remember I shall keep an eye on you."

What a wave of terror surged over the woman's heart as she listened. Slowly and like one in a dream she proceeded to obey the pirate's suggestion.

The child at her side, unconscious of the terrible calamity that had befallen them, gazed into his mother's despairing face with looks of wonder. All hope had fled from her heart at last.

She could do nothing but obey the bidding of the human monster, who, keeping a wary eye upon her movements through the open door, was busying himself in gathering up the ship's instruments, the bag of treasure and all else that seemed to him worth the trouble of taking.

These he thrust indiscriminately into an empty bag.

Then throwing it over his shoulder he again approached the lady's state-room.

"Ah! you are all ready, eh? That is well, for I like promptness. By the way, you'd better throw a veil over your pretty face. I would not care to have my own men see what a pretty prize has fallen into my hands. They might become jealous, you see."

That was not the real motive that actuated him. Of all the victims that had fallen into his hands, none of his men had ever seen their faces; but no one ever knew what was the reason for his queer precaution.

The woman obeyed him without a word.

Her hand was still tightly clasped in that of her child as if she feared for his safety.

"Never fear for the little chap, my beauty," said the pirate, carelessly. "I've no particular objection to the youngster remaining with you, so long as you act sensibly."

What a terrible threat was implied in those few deeply-emphasized words.

The face of the woman turned deadly pale as she heard them.

It was only by a strong effort that she retained her senses. How long would her brain stand proof against that fearful strain before she would go mad?

Slowly, and with faltering steps, she followed her captor to the deck, and soon Santillez saw his victim safely in the cabin of the schooner.

Fearing she might escape him again, he pushed her into a state-room, and bolted the door.

Then he again returned to the brig and looked around him. Three of the brig's crew, though badly wounded, were still alive.

Added to these was Captain Zeke, her late commander. A bullet-hole in his shoulder, pale as death from weakness, he was still watchful and defiant.

The pirates had bound the prisoners' arms tightly behind them.

Santillez surveyed them coolly for a moment, and then said:

"Bring them here to the hatchway, and lash them fast around it."

The hatches had already been removed, and the keg of powder lowered in the hold.

The cargo had been lifted out until the bottom of the keg was only a few feet from the keel of the doomed vessel.

Santillez snatched up a long coil of fuse lying on the deck. Determined there should be no chance of failure this time, he descended into the hold.

Removing the cover from the keg, he carefully coiled the fuse upon the open powder. Then he lit the end and hurriedly sprung out.

"Back to the schooner, boys!" he cried, as he led the way.

Well he knew the frightful risk he ran. A single stray spark from the fuse dropping into the powder might blow them up at any instant.

Secured to the hatchway in such a position that they could easily see the fate in store for them, the wounded survivors of the pirate's vengeance looked for instant annihilation. Literally were they compelled to stare death in the face.

With a fiendish malignity, worthy of such a hard-hearted scoundrel, had the pirate carried out his infernal plan. A half-dozen yards of fuse lay coiled upon the open powder.

Slowly, but none the less surely, the fatal spark crept on its mission.

The pirate schooner, with all sail set to catch the light breeze, moved slowly away from the spot.

With what superhuman strength the wounded wretches tugged at the cords which confined them; but, all in vain! The pirates had done their work only too well.

With one accord they saw the hopelessness of the attempt, and ceased their struggles. Their lips moved mechanically in prayer to the Father of all mercies.

Oh, that the Heavens would open in a second deluge to drown out yonder fatal spark.

With bated breath they waited for the dreaded moment.

Instants of time became hours, and minutes years.

The spark still crept slowly on its murderous way. Only one coil now remained upon the open powder.

Two minutes more, and the explosion would hurl them to atoms.

Just at that instant, something scraped harshly against the side of the brig.

In the awful intensity of their danger, they heeded it not. It is doubtful if they even heard it.

"Safe! Thank God!" said a hearty, though enfeebled voice.

Slowly clambering over the side, came the powerful form of Job Rogers, the mate.

Captain Zeke gazed upon him as if he had seen an apparition. Then in an instant he saw that the form before him was in reality flesh and blood.

Expecting instant death himself, he resolved to make the effort to save one life at least.

"Overboard again, for your life!" he shouted. "We are doomed men."

The rest of the crew, unheeding the mate's presence, were gazing with fascinated eyes upon the powder beneath them.

With one bound, Job Rogers sprang to the hatch-combings and looked down. The next instant he had leaped into the hold.

Very carefully he picked up the lighted fuse then but a quarter of an inch short of contact.

Crushing out the tiny spark in his hands, he tossed it upon the deck above.

Weakened as he was, the exertion had been too great for him. For the first time in his life, the strong man fainted—his body falling across that fatal keg.

A cry of thanksgiving broke from the lips of the witnesses. They laughed and cried by turns like men crazy with joy.

Heaven had indeed answered their prayers, when all human aid seemed impossible.

There was still one drawback to their cup of happiness. Secured as they were, they could do nothing to aid their brave rescuer.

What if that act was the last of his life?

Their fears were soon brought to an end. Nature came to the relief of an iron constitution. In a few moments the brave mate regained his consciousness. Slowly and painfully he dragged himself to the deck above. He gave one cautious glance in the direction of the retreating schooner.

By this time the latter was disappearing in the distance.

Drawing a keen poniard from the belt of one of the dead pirates, the mate quickly severed the bonds that confined his companions. He worked painfully as if the effort cost him a hard struggle.

Then descending into the cabin he soon reappeared with a bottle of brandy, from which he served out to his companions a good allowance.

The fiery liquor—valuable indeed at such a time—served to stimulate and put new spirit into their weakened bodies.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, my hearties; all is not lost yet," said the mate, hopefully.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER THE CONFLICT.

DESPITE the mate's brave words, there was a tinge of sadness in his tones. He was thinking of the helpless victim in the pirate's clutches, and designed for a fate far worse than death.

Severely wounded as were the survivors of the brig, there were hopes of life yet, and the Yankee skipper was not a bad doctor. Unheeding his own wounds, Captain Zeke at once proceeded to attend to the wants of his companions. Bringing up the vessel's medicine-chest, which luckily the pirate had left undisturbed, he was soon busily engaged in preparing bandages.

Job Rogers was assisting in this task, when, all of a sudden, he was noticed to turn pale; and then, with a gasping cry, he sunk to the deck. For the second time, the strong man had fainted.

Captain Zeke dropped his work with a startled air.

"Help me strip him, men," said he hurriedly. "I fear he must be dangerously hurt."

It may seem a little strange to the reader that this fact was not sooner noticed. It must be remembered, though, that the plunge overboard had washed away all traces of blood from his wet clothing. Added to this, the salt of the ocean had partly checked the flow.

It was the violent exertions the mate had afterward made that started the bleeding afresh. Still, like a martyr of old, he had preferred to keep his suffering secret until the needs of the others had been supplied.

With trembling hands, they tore open his shirt and bared his bosom. The captain's face was very grave as he saw the ragged hole where the bullet had entered.

Very close to the mate's heart it was. Ah! little hope now had they of his recovery.

The captain made a hasty examination of the wound.

"We can but ease his last moments, I fear," he said sadly.

Suddenly a great flash of joy spread over his rugged features.

"Heaven has spared his life to us," he cried, in a tone of devout thankfulness.

"See!" he added, pointing to a hard, round lump on the victim's side. "The bullet has struck a rib and glanced aside."

"Hand me that stiletto, Dick! Hurry, before he comes to."

Taking the keen weapon, the captain—his hand now firm as steel—made a slight incision over the spot, and the next moment he held the leaden bullet in his hand.

"He has fainted from loss of blood," said he, as he proceeded to bind up the mate's wounds, and

while he was thus engaged, Job Rogers slowly opened his eyes.

"I'm weak as a cat, boys," he apologetically murmured. "Ain't it queer, though, that I should drop off that way again like a great lubber? Ah, cap'n," he added, as he saw what was being done, "I'm afeared it's all of no use. I've hung on hard, but I'm afeared those rascals have given me a settler this time."

"You'll live long after they're in their graves, I hope," replied Captain Zeke, with tears of quiet joy running down his bony cheeks. "Here's the bullet that did all the mischief. It missed your heart by a hair's breadth only. Your life will be spared to us after all."

Job Rogers glanced from one to the other as if to assure himself that they were not trying to encourage him with false hopes. Satisfied on this point, he replied:

"Then I may yet have the pleasure of seeing that scoundrel hung. I'd give something for that sight. Ah! it would be worth a dozen years of my lotted life to see them rascals swinging in the air with a good piece of half-inch stuff knotted around their necks. Poor Mrs. Sanders! It riles me when I think of her being in the clutches of that beast of a Spaniard. Pass me the bottle, boys; I feel weak when I think of it."

Captain Clark turned away to hide the emotions that swept through his honest heart at the words.

"The breeze is freshening up once more," he said presently. "May Providence grant that we may be spared another hurricane in our disabled condition. Tom,"—addressing one of the three sailors—"do you feel strong enough to take the wheel a bit?"

"I'll try it, cap'n," was the brave reply. It will be remembered that the brig had a few sails set at the moment the pirate appeared in sight. Bringing the wheel into service, she began to slowly forge ahead.

"Ugh!" exclaimed the mate as he glanced at the decks littered with the dead men, "it was a terrible fight. What shall be done with these pirates, cap'n? They don't deserve Christian burial."

"We're too short-handed to give it to them, anyhow," replied Captain Zeke quietly. "We'll toss the bodies overboard at once. As for our own five brave lads, we will at least bury them decently. Lay them side by side in the main gangway. Poor fellows! I little thought they would leave me thus."

Pausing only to possess themselves of the dead pirates' weapons, they proceeded with their sickening task.

Then the dead crew of the brig were tenderly laid side by side on deck.

Over their silent bodies was stretched the flag under which they had fought so nobly.

There they must wait until the enfeebled survivors could perform the last solemn rites over their remains before consigning them to their last home.

This unwelcome task ended, they threw a few buckets of water over the deck to wash away the last traces of the frightful scene so lately enacted.

The mate, still weak, but firm of will as ever, proceeded to light a fire in the galley for their evening meal, for the cook was one of those now lying dead under the national emblem.

While the water was heating the mate rejoined his companions on the quarter-deck.

"How was it you managed to slip out of their clutches, Job?" asked the captain.

"It's a puzzle to myself, cap'n," was the reply. "You see, I had just rammed the powder home for a second dose afore the rascals were on top of me, so to speak. It wasn't a time for foolin' just then, so I just touched off the powder slap in their faces. The bullets war flying around me then thicker'n hair on a dog. The fust thing I knew I felt something hit me kerslap in the chest, an' that war a bullet. It war certain death to face the rascals longer. 'Well,' thinks I, 'better go to the bottom at once than ter wait fer them devils to send me there.' With that I jumped overboard. You know I was allus a good swimmer. I didn't feel hurt much in the excitement, and when I went under I staid as long as I could. I came up at last, on the other side of the bows. From what I heard 'em say, I knew they'd given me up for a gone coon, so I jest kept quiet. Lucky for me, the end of the main-sheet was dragging overboard, so I jest hung on to it like grim death. From where I war I could overhear that scoundrel in the cabin. The way the lady pleaded with him went straight to my heart. She might as well have axed a favor of the iron anchor for'ard. Thunder! but it made my blood boil to hear the villain tell her he war her master. I'd have given anything to hev bin in the cabin, jest at that minnit. Howsomever, that warn't possible. Thar was nothing left for me to do but lay low so long as them bloody rascals war on deck. It seemed like a mighty long time afore I heard him give the order to leave. I expected of course, to find you all dead and the ship scuttled. Still, I darsn't show my head on deck so long as they war around, you see. I hadn't the least notion, though, of what the scoundrels had really done."

"Why, that was a wuss torture nor I ever heerd tell on among the Inguns, an' they don't purfess to be civilized."

"Ain't that a sail yonder, cap'n?" exclaimed Tom Longstreet. His long, bony finger was pointed toward the same point from which their late assailants had appeared.

Captain Zeke caught up his telescope and gazed in the direction indicated.

"Yes, you're right, Tom."

"What do you make her out, cap'n?" asked the mate. "I hope we ain't goin' to be visited by any more pirates to-day."

"Not this time," was the reply. "It is a large

ship. Her foretop-mast has been carried away and some of her head-gear gone. Hurrah!" he added, in another moment; "it is a man-of-war (I can see her guns) and she flies our own colors!" Our signal of distress is still flying, and she will be sure to see it."

But, one hour, and still another passed by without a sign of recognition.

In fact the two vessels were every moment drawing further apart in their course.

"They'll miss us, after all," said Captain Zeke, sadly.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the mate, suddenly; "what hev we been thinkin' on all this time? We can make her see us by firing our bow-gun."

He rushed toward it as he spoke only to meet a heavy disappointment.

The piece was split from end to end.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MOTHER'S SUBLIME THREAT.

PEDRO SANTILIZ, after getting safely clear of the brig, stood watching her with basilisk eyes as the schooner slowly glided away.

"Ah, Sancho!" he remarked to his lieutenant, "that was a lucky thought of mine. How those fellows must enjoy the amusement I've prepared for them! It may be, too, that a stray spark will send them up at any minute. That was the reason I was in such a hurry to leave her."

Sancho laughed in unison with his chief. It was rarely that the latter was in such a wonderful good humor.

"How long before the fuse will burn out, senor?"

"Perhaps an hour yet. We'll be too far away to see the fun, but the report will reach us."

Ah, little did he dream that his deep-laid and infamous plan was destined to be so wonderfully frustrated.

Soon afterward, the man on look-out reported a sail in sight. It was but barely visible from deck. The pirate seized his glass and ran aloft to investigate.

"It's the Yankee cruiser again," he muttered, with an oath. "We've nothing to fear from her, just now; but I don't care to have them see me, at present. I must not have my lady-bird below disturbed by any more excitement," he added, with a grim smile.

"On deck, there!"

"Ay, ay, senor."

"Keep her off a couple of points."

"Two points off it is, senor."

The pirate watched the cruiser a short time longer. Then, feeling assured that the latter had not noticed him, he descended to the deck.

"Now I must go down and see how my beauty is getting on," he muttered. "I must keep a sharp eye on her, too, or she will give me the slip. Ah! I have a plan."

Descending to the luxuriantly furnished cabin, he saw that the door of her room was locked from the inside.

"Thinks to lock me out, eh?" he said with a light laugh. "As if bolts and bars could keep me from her! Open the door, my beauty," said he, speaking as soft and gentle as possible.

But no sound greeted his listening ears.

"I hope she hasn't done herself an injury," was the anxious thought that flashed through his mind.

"Come, my birdie, open that door and save me the trouble of bursting it in."

Still no answer.

The pirate drew back to put his threat in execution, but paused and began feeling his pockets.

"What a fool I am! I forgot I had a key."

Producing it as he spoke, he inserted it in the door and softly turned the knob.

"Ah, she is asleep," he muttered; "that is well."

He spoke truly. Worn out with excitement and fatigue, the woman had thrown herself upon the cot and was soundly sleeping. Nature had come to blot out, for a while, her troubles.

How the pirate's eyes gazed in admiration upon her lovely form! Her hair, golden as the sun, had escaped from the comb, and lay in rich masses upon her pillow. The left arm with its delicately molded wrist and shapely hand upon which glittered a heavy gold wedding-ring, was extended; while upon that arm, nestling close to her side, was the beautiful child she loved so fondly.

Lovely as the mother who bore him, he seemed. He slept the sleep of innocence, little dreaming of the savage whose gloating eyes were fixed upon the mother he adored.

"Ah!" muttered the pirate softly. "Fairer woman than that my eyes have never seen. My drunken lieutenant was right when he described her beauty. Never would my eyes have rested upon her, though, if he had captured the prize. Luck is with me again. I could find no better chance to get rid of a row. I'll just take the little brat out of the way before she wakes. She will be all the easier to manage when the youngster is in my hands."

So saying he stooped over and very softly raised the little sleeper from the bed. The mother stirred uneasily in her sleep; but did not waken. Moving forward on tip-toes the pirate crept toward the cabin with his burden.

Just as he reached it, the child stirred as if to awaken. Quick as thought the pirate's huge paw was clapped over its mouth.

Ascending to the deck he said hurriedly: "Here, Sancho, take this brat forward and tell one of the men to take good care of him. I may want him again before long, and—"

His words were suddenly cut short by a cry of terror, so wild, so piercing that it seemed to freeze the very life-blood in their veins.

"Quick, Sancho!" exclaimed the pirate, tossing

the child to his lieutenant. "Out of sight with it, at once; the woman has wakened!"

Ay, the mother had indeed discovered her terrible loss, and as the pirate chief turned, he saw that his prisoner had gained the deck.

In one glance she took in the whole scene.

"Men!" she cried wildly, "if there be human hearts in your bosoms, give me back my child!"

She spoke in clear, fluent Spanish.

The little fellow, now wide awake, was crying lustily to be restored to his mother's arms.

The crew gazed entranced upon the woman's face, and from that to their chief, as if uncertain how to act.

"Out of sight with the brat, I tell you!" cried the pirate, fiercely, as he started forward to secure the woman. She divined his purpose, and with one bound reached the low rail at the stern.

Her eyes flashed with a deadly purpose.

"Bring back my boy!" she cried, in clear, ringing tones; "or, as true as there is a God above us, I will throw myself in the sea!"

Well, indeed, had she calculated upon the power her beauty had made upon the pirate's feelings, for heart he had none.

Pedro Santiliz hesitated.

She placed her right foot upon the low rail for the fatal plunge.

"Hold! I yield to beauty," exclaimed the pirate, with a forced laugh.

"Ho there, for'ard! Bring the brat to me."

He raised the frightened child in his strong arms, and approached the mother.

"Back!" she cried, seeing his purpose. "Come not near me, monster, or the child shall see his mother's sacrifice."

The pirate grated his teeth in rage.

"Ah, my lady," he hissed, softly, "you will lose much of that fiery spirit before I am through with you."

Aloud, he said, in pretended indifference:

"You are needlessly alarmed, my sweet one. However, you shall have it as you please."

He placed the little fellow upon the deck. The child scampered to his mother's arms.

"Can I oblige you in anything further, my dear?" asked the pirate, with an attempt at conciliation.

"Yes; go away, that I may again reach my room undisturbed."

"Certainly, I will oblige you in that," replied the pirate, with alacrity, for he was far from easy so long as she remained in her present position. Well he knew what a desperate woman is capable of doing.

As he strode forward a few yards, the woman stood gazing thoughtfully after him. Then she glanced for a moment into the blue waters below.

"Would it not be the best for us both, my child?" she murmured sadly. "Ah, my boy, you little realize the dangers that surround us. No," she added, with a sigh; "Heaven's will must not be defied. God sees the terrible danger we are in. We will pray to Him together, my darling."

With these words she disappeared in the cabin.

"Ah! but that was a most narrow escape!" exclaimed Santiliz, breathing freer. "She had half a notion to 'slip her moorings' and leave me, after all. I'll see to it that she does not give me another fright like that."

"Senor," said Sancho, approaching him, "it is growing night. Whither shall we head our course?"

"To the island," was the quick reply. "Make the channel by morning, if you can."

With these words he disappeared in the cabin.

"He's clean gone on his prize," muttered Sancho, with a scowl. "He's like a youngster with a new toy when he gets hold of a pretty lass. Perdition seize me; but I wouldn't mind making love to her myself. What a screech she gave when she missed her brat! Ugh! It makes me nervous to think of it," and shrugging his shoulders uneasily, he again turned to his duties.

Once more the pirate found himself baffled. The door of the prisoner's room was bolted from the inside.

"Well," he muttered with a look of rage and disappointment, "there's no use in raising another row just at present. I'll let things rest quietly, as they are, until morning. Perhaps she will be in a better humor by that time."

So saying, he threw himself heavily upon his cot and was soon soundly asleep.

His trusty lieutenant awakened him at daylight.

"Pardon, senor; but the island is in sight. There are some queer flags flying from the cliffs."

The pirate was wide awake in an instant, and snatching up his telescope he sprang on deck at a bound.

CHAPTER XIX.

INFERNAL DEVICES.

JOHN FRAZER took up the sewing materials laid before him and was soon busily engaged upon the various-colored bunting at his feet, and long in the night he continued his task. At length it was completed. Before him lay ten curiously shaped flags, each one of which represented a figure, from one to naught. By their various combinations, aided by the information already gained, he could signal the truth to any ship belonging to the American Navy.

"There!" he remarked, quietly, as he laid aside his work. "I've made a better job of it than I expected. I hope that my plans may not fail in their purpose. There is work still ahead of me before daylight. I must be careful that the dwarf does not suspect my purpose."

So saying, he gathered up the flags, and pausing only long enough to assure himself that the dwarf was sleeping, he passed out of the front entrance. Descending the steep stairway he picked up a light

spar designed for a tent-pole. Procuring a small block and light line from the crew's quarters, he proceeded to reeve halliards.

Lashing the block to the end of the pole, he wrapped the line along its length. Then raising it to his shoulder, he again ascended the stairway. He reached the narrow ledge leading to the pirate's quarters.

Leaning the pole against the face of the cliff he cleared the halliards. Taking the end of these in his hand and wrapping the flags around his body, he began the steeper ascent.

Sure footed as a chamois, he gained the summit at last, and then, pulling on the rope, he raised the pole to his side.

After a little search, he found a narrow cleft in the rock upon which to plant his flagstaff.

The wind whistled around his ears with violence. It was no easy matter to raise the pole to its place; but he did so, at last, and wedging the foot of it securely in its place with fragments of rock, he unrolled his flags.

Selecting three of these, he attached them to the halliards and hoisted them to the peak.

"There," he exclaimed, in satisfaction, as he placed a heavy stone upon the remaining flags and again descended, "I fancy that even the dwarf's sharp eyes will fail to see what is directly above his head. I must be on my guard to-morrow, too, for should Santilez take it in his head to return, his eyes must not rest upon what I have done in his absence."

So saying he re-entered the pirate's quarters. The task he now set himself to perform was no easy one. It was none other than to remove the pirate's gold and jewels to a hiding-place known only to himself. It was laborious work, indeed, but he kept stubbornly on at his task.

At daylight he awoke the dwarf and ordered him to prepare breakfast.

This was soon placed before him, but as he sat down to the table, he noticed that the dwarf seemed fearful and uneasy.

Knowing well the latter's revengeful and treacherous disposition, he watched him narrowly.

As he raised a cup of fragrant coffee to his lips, a peculiar light glittered in the dwarf's eyes.

He set the cup down without tasting.

"Baba," said he, very quietly, but with a dangerous flash in his dark eyes, "you will force me to kill you, yet. Take away the coffee and bring me a bottle of wine instead. I do not care to be *poisoned*."

The dwarf trembled in every limb at these words. His craftily-laid scheme had failed.

Doubtless true did it seem to him now that this terrible master was indeed able to read his very thoughts.

For the present, at least, he was staggered in the hope of being able to outwit the man he hated.

The mind of the dwarf was racked with conflicting fears. On the one hand an invisible and powerful influence compelled him against his will to serve the man he hated. Again a tremor seized him as he thought of what would be his punishment when his rightful master returned.

How was he to reveal the truth when the only means of doing so—his tongue—was powerless to perform its duty?

It was death to defy his present master, and most likely the same from the true one.

He began seriously to think that the only way out of the dilemma would be to throw himself into the sea and thus escape them both.

"That was a narrow escape for me," said John Frazer, thoughtfully. "Had Baba been a little less ignorant, and more able to conceal his emotions, I should have swallowed his dose, without suspicions. Danger on every hand. I seem to be treading the verge of a precipice. Would that I could but see my way clear from the labyrinth that surrounds me! Ah, my loved ones, how little you dream of the dangers that envelop me at this moment!"

He pushed back his chair and rose to his feet. Selecting a cigar from the pirate's store, he lit it and approached the door. Glancing cautiously around to assure himself that the dwarf was not in sight, he picked up a telescope and ascended to the top of the cliff, from which he could sweep the horizon in every direction.

Adjusting the focus of his glass, he gazed long and earnestly over the sea.

Not a sail in sight.

"The cruiser must have abandoned her search for the present," he sighed. "Ah, if she would but come this way before that villain takes it into his head to return!"

It may be months before such an opportunity will again occur.

Buoyed with hope he remained at his post the livelong day; but no sail appeared to reward his eyes.

As the sun began slowly to sink beneath the waters, he sadly descended from his post.

"Supper, slave, at once!" he said, peremptorily, coming suddenly upon the dwarf.

The latter hurried to obey.

Keenly on the alert as usual, John Frazer noticed that a handsome arm-chair had been drawn to the head of the table for his accommodation.

He glanced at it with suspicion.

"Nothing like being upon my guard," he muttered, as he proceeded to examine it critically in the dwarf's absence. "There may be a trap in this thing, for all I know. I'll wait and see."

Soon afterward the dwarf reappeared, loaded with tempting dishes.

As he set them down his body came directly in front of the chair.

Standing behind his back John Frazer reached forward, grasped him by both shoulders and forced him back in the seat.

It was all done so quickly the dwarf had no chance

to save himself. He fell back with a gurgling cry and then the mystery of the chair was revealed.

From cunningly concealed sockets, there suddenly sprung out long curved bands of steel, and the occupant of the chair was a helpless prisoner. Feet, arms, and neck were encircled in their grasp in such a manner that it was impossible to escape!

"Poiled again, Baba!" said John Frazer, coolly. "You see it is of no use. I hardly think it will be worth my while to spare your life. However, I'll consider the matter while I'm eating my supper. Meanwhile I shall allow you to occupy the chair you so kindly provided for my accommodation."

And, eat his supper he did, watching the terror-stricken face of the helpless dwarf with undisguised satisfaction. Having finished a hearty meal, he said, quietly:

"Now I will see what can be done for you. In the first place you must tell me the secret of the spring or I'm afraid I shall have to leave you there until your scoundrel of a master returns."

The dwarf's eyes rolled violently. He made a backward motion with his head and uttered a gurgling sound.

"In this neighborhood, eh?" said John Frazer, coolly. "Ah! this must be it, then," pressing a small round knot as he spoke.

As he did so the steel bands shot back into their hiding-places with a sharp click.

"I've thought it all over, Baba, and concluded to spare your life *this* time," said John Frazer, as the dwarf sprang to his feet. "Beware, though, how you try any more such experiments on me again! Now clear away the table."

So saying he picked up a book from a handsome rack hanging against the wall and pretended to be interested in its contents, but in reality, was covertly watching the dwarf's every movement.

The latter proceeded with his task, with marked trepidation. There was evidently something preying upon his mind.

Moving back the fatal chair against the wall, the dwarf next took the one that Frazer had lately occupied and carelessly set it over in one corner of the room.

He was unusually long in clearing away the dishes. Even then he soon after returned to the room. In one corner, close to the spot where he had placed the second chair, a handsome swinging lamp depended from the ceiling. This the dwarf lighted and then proceeded to tidy up the apartment.

"I'll change my seat while he's tidying up," thought John Frazer, as he started to rise.

In doing so, he rested his weight somewhat heavily upon the corner of the table.

There was a sudden crash and then a section of the door underneath the lamp, just lighted by the dwarf, suddenly disappeared!

The unoccupied chair standing on the spot was instantly swallowed up out of sight!

Following its fall, came the sound of wood upon steel.

"Trap number three," said John Frazer, his face slightly pale.

He looked around for the dwarf; but the latter had disappeared in the darkness of the night, and walking over to the spot, he looked down. A shudder ran through his veins as he did so. The light overhead revealed a deep well-like cavity, some five feet in diameter. Its sides were lined with sharp, murderous-looking blades, their points projecting outward.

CHAPTER XX.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

THE cruiser "Vixen" was pursuing her way with her bow pointed toward the nearest port where she might be enabled to replace her lost spars. The faces of her officers were sad and despondent. Fate seemed to have aided their enemies, when victory was almost within their grasp.

"Well, there is no use in crying over what can't be helped," said the first lieutenant, with an attempt at cheerfulness, to the officers seated around the ward-room table.

"What makes it worse," continued the speaker, "is to think that he boarded that brig right under our noses, as it were, and yet we missed him. By the way, Mr. Wilson, I forgot to ask you her name."

"Not a very poetical one, I must confess," answered the second lieutenant, with a smile. "She was the Nancy Jones, from 'Rio' to New York, with a mixed cargo."

But the latter part of the sentence was scarcely heard. Every eye was turned in surprise upon the first lieutenant.

Springing to his feet, his every nerve quivering with excitement, he said, hastily:

"There was no one killed, I hope?"

"No," was the reply. "The captain had a hard rap on the head or something of that kind, and I believe the mate was hurt; but nothing serious. Why do you ask?"

"Because, the captain of that vessel is my own father! Oh, to think of the danger he was in, and I suspected nothing of it at all!"

"All the better for us, I should say, Paul," remarked Captain Clark, who had been listening to the conversation. "Had you known the truth, you would have been for jumping the 'Vixen' over the reefs last night instead of taking to the channel, as we did."

There was a general laugh at this sally, and then Mr. Wilson said, quietly:

"Mr. Jones comes of good old fighting stock, that is easily seen. I had a report of the affair from the mate of the brig. He told me that the captain defied his enemies even when he was helplessly bound and in their power."

Yes, brave Job Rogers had fully extolled his captain's courage; but he said never a word of his own heroism on that occasion. Like all true heroes he was very modest in sounding his own praises.

"We interrupted the chap in the very nick of time," said the second lieutenant, continuing his story. There was a lady on board whom the villains tried to capture just as they sighted us, but they left the brig in such haste that they even forgot to take with them the bag of gold they had thrown on the table."

If will be seen that the story was far from being correctly told; but then Job Rogers had given him the outlines.

"At any rate, Paul, you can now rest easy in your mind," said Captain Clark, kindly. "By this time your father is far enough away from this locality to fear nothing more from Santilez."

"You're right there, captain," chimed in Mr. Wilson; "and, what is more, the pirate will not—"

"Officer of the deck reports a sail in sight, sir," announced a young midgy, suddenly appearing in the doorway and saluting the captain.

"Let us go on deck, gentlemen, and see what it is," and the captain proceeded to the look-out. "I hope she may carry a spare spar that we can borrow."

"She seems to be in distress, sir," said the officer in charge, as the commander of the Vixen stepped upon the bridge. "I can make out a flag flying; but at this distance it is impossible to distinguish the colors."

"Bring me my telescope, youngster," ordered the captain to the boy who attended him.

It was a costly and powerful instrument.

Hardly had he glanced through the tube before he said:

"It is a merchantman in distress. Put the ship about at once."

The necessary orders were quickly carried out.

The huge ship swung round on her heel and headed directly for the strange sail.

"Will you allow me to take that glass for a moment, captain?" asked the first lieutenant, with a tremor of agitation in his voice.

"Certainly, Mr. Jones. What! are you still nervous about your father's safety? He must be many miles away ere this."

"You forget the storm last night, sir," was the respectful reply, as the young man took the glass. "Ah!" he added, suddenly, with renewed excitement; "I am not mistaken; yonder craft is my father's brig."

"Never mind, Paul," said Captain Clark, with a quiet smile; "we'll run down to her just as quick as we can. I never pass a vessel in distress."

Very impatiently did the officers of the Vixen watch the vessel they were slowly approaching.

"She has been roughly handled in the storm, I see," remarked Captain Clark, to the sailing-master beside him; "most of her top-hamper is carried away."

Lowering his tone, so that his lieutenant should not overhear him, he added:

"I can only see five men on her deck. The rest of them must have been washed overboard in the gale last night, else they would surely be on deck when they know we are coming to their aid."

A half-hour later, the Vixen was hove to, within a short distance of the brig and a boat lowered, the first lieutenant in the stern sheets.

"Give way strong, men," he cried to the crew. "I have a deep interest in yonder vessel."

Little need had the men of urging. The young officer was well liked by them all. Their broad backs were bent to their oars until it seemed as if the tough blades would break under the pressure. As the cutter's side scraped the brig, the young officer grasped the rope thrown him, and sprang on deck.

The first man to receive him was his own father!

The old man's face was pale, but the indomitable spirit he possessed still snapped in his eyes.

"Jerusalem!" he exclaimed, delightedly; "I declare if it ain't my own Paul!"

The next moment father and son were clasped in each other's arms. As the young officer released himself from that embrace and glanced around, he said, hurriedly:

"What has happened to you? You all seem to be hurt; and what has become of the rest of the crew?"

"Dead, my lad," said the old man solemnly.

"For Heaven's sake what do you mean?"

"Pirates!" replied Captain Zeke. "We've had a most wonderful escape."

"But I thought—that is, I heard you did not lose a man."

"Nuther we did, Paul, *the first time*."

The young officer started as if he had been stung.

"What!" he gasped, "you don't mean to say the scoundrel paid you a second visit?"

"Not the same chap; but I'm pretty sartin now, that it was the same gang."

"When did all this happen?"

"Not four hours ago."

"Describe their vessel."

"As trim a schooner as ever I set eyes on, Paul, and sailed by as big a scoundrel as ever went unhung."

"I believe all that," replied the young officer quickly, "for we've met him before. Why, it was only last night that we chased the villain and carried away our foretopmast without being able to overhaul him. You must go back to the 'Vixen' with me and tell Captain Clark the whole story."

"But, I can't leave my ship, Paul. We're short-handed enough as it is and—"

"You needn't make any more excuses, father, for here comes a second boat's crew to your relief. Captain Clark is a regular trump. I rather think he suspected something wrong from the start."

"Well?" he asked inquiringly as the second boat

shot along side and a young middy climbed over the rail as agile as a monkey.

"Captain Clark's compliments to the first lieutenant and he wishes you to return with Capt. Jones," rattled off the middy rapidly. "I am ordered to remain here with the second cutter's men until further orders."

"You see, I was right, father," said the young man with a pleased smile.

In a few moments more, the first cutter was pulling back to the "Vixen."

Not long afterward, the brave Yankee skipper was shaking hands with the officers on board the cruiser.

Passing down into the wardroom they took seats around the table and listened in mute wonder while Captain Zeke detailed the exciting events his vessel had so lately passed through.

This time the mate's bravery and lion-heart came out in its true colors, told by the captain's truthful lips.

As he went on to describe the pirate's escape with his victim, and the terrible fate planned for the brig's survivors, a cry of horror broke from the listeners' lips. Their fists were clenched and their eyes flashed fire.

The "Vixen's" commander was no less excited.

"Oh that I could but catch sight of him once more!" he cried in righteous anger. "He should not long live to triumph in his wickedness. I'd give every dollar I am worth for a new foretopmast."

"You can take the brig's, cap'n," said Paul's father. "It will answer your purpose, I guess, and it shall not cost you a cent. Why, I'd give the whole craft, cargo and all, to see those fellows' bodies dangling from a yard-arm."

"Ah," said Captain Clark sadly, "it is easy enough to say what we should so much desire to see. In our excitement we have forgotten a most important question, and that is, 'where shall we find him?'"

"In his lair, sir," replied Paul Jones promptly, with an air of conviction. "His greed is satiated with what he already has gained. Rest assured he will retire to his den and glut himself, content for awhile with what he has in his possession."

The majority of the officers agreed with him in this opinion.

"I do not dispute you, Paul," said the captain, slowly; "but, where shall we find his rendezvous?"

CHAPTER XXI.

CAGING HIS PREY.

As the pirate glanced through the glass at the three small flags fluttering from the highest peak of the island, a muttered curse escaped his lips.

"What can have happened now?" he cried, "and what does Baba mean by that, I wonder?"

The next moment a cry of unbounded rage broke from his lips.

"What am I thinking of, anyhow? Baba knows nothing of signals, and couldn't tell one letter from another."

As he spoke, he sprang down into the cabin, to return presently with a book similar in appearance to the one he had left ashore. Over this he ran his eye swiftly, down the page.

Suddenly the moving finger stood still. All the wicked passions of his nature seemed to rise to his face at the discovery he had made.

"Help! Pirates!"

"So that is what mean those signal flags, eh?" he hissed between his clenched teeth. "An enemy is on the island, and would betray us. Who can it be? Surely not Baba, for it is out of his power to read. And yet, how happens it that he has allowed that signal to be raised over his head? Well, we shall soon solve this mystery. Crowd on all sail, Sancho. Every moment is precious while yonder bunting is flying."

On sped the swift vessel, while the impatient and angry pirate walked the deck with muttered curses upon his lips. Often did he raise his glass and sweep that portion of the island visible from the sea, in the hope of getting some clew to the mystery. But, his keen eyes saw nothing to reward their vigilance. Not even the dwarf's familiar figure could be distinguished.

At last, the schooner shot into the channel, and, steered by the steady hand of the pirate, soon reached her usual mooring-place behind the sheltering cliff.

Hardly had her sails been lowered, before the pirate ordered his boat, and was hastily landed. Up the narrow rocky staircase he mounted with surprising agility.

Once inside the door of his quarters, he saw at a glance that they had been visited in his absence.

Nor could it have been the dwarf. He was quick to read signs, and the open book lying on the table, with a few other circumstances he noted, told him plainly that it was not the work of his slave.

Bursting open the door of the latter's apartment—which had been bolted from within—he saw that Baba was soundly sleeping.

"May perdition seize you, you dog!" he cried, grasping the dwarf in his vigorous clutch, and dragging him to the floor. "What has happened here in my absence? and how comes it I find you asleep, instead of being on watch for my return? How came those flags flying from the top of the cliff?"

Black lightning shot from the pirate's eyes as the questions came thick and fast from his excited lips.

The dwarf eyed his master with terrified, rolling eyes. A low, gurgling sound, dreadful to hear, issued from his lips.

"Will you speak?" cried the pirate, laying his hand fiercely on the hilt of his dagger, "or must I use persuasion first?"

The dwarf dropped on his knees. Still uttering

that horrid sound, he opened his lips and displayed his mutilated tongue.

"Ah!" ejaculated the pirate, his anger against his slave somewhat abating. "Who is this that has dared to take such liberties in my absence?"

The dwarf's features worked convulsively. His lips moved; but no articulate sound came from them.

"I shall have to solve this riddle in some other way, I see," muttered Santillez, uneasily.

Throwing a look of disgust upon the dwarf, he turned on his heel and strode into the open air. His first act was to scale the cliff and tear down the obnoxious signals.

"At least they have been discovered in time. Now to look into this mystery."

Descending to the beach, he joined the rest of the men who had just landed.

In a few words he related all that he had discovered.

"Scatter at once, men," he ordered, "and search the island from end to end. When you find your game, take it alive and bring it before me at once. Do no more injury than you can help. Pedro Santillez will show you it is no child's play to trifle with him."

The words came from his lips like the hiss of a serpent.

The pirates hastily scattered to do their bidding, while Santillez returned once more to his quarters.

Every nook and corner of them was thoroughly searched by the pirate. The dwarf joined him in the task with alacrity. He felt confident that his master would be more than sufficient to shield him from the man who had so strangely controlled him. Even the secret passages were thoroughly ransacked, lest by any chance the mysterious individual had been acquainted with the secret of their existence. But all their search was powerless to solve the mystery.

No thought of the missing John Trazer entered the pirate's mind. He had long ago settled into the belief that the man had been washed overboard that night.

Unluckily, too, the dwarf, naturally stupid, could see no way to give the chief a clew.

It was past noon before the pirates began to straggle into their quarters again. Every part of the little island had been thoroughly explored; but nothing had occurred to reward their search. Their faces bore a look of perplexity, and their superstitious fears began to be awakened.

"It's all the woman's doings, mates," averred one of their number, in a low guarded tone. "We'll have no more luck until we're well rid of her. There was a shark following in our wake from the time we parted from the brig, and you all know what that means. It's bad luck every time."

"We will have to shoulder it, then," replied one of his companions with an uneasy air. "There's no use telling the chief what we think. Too well I know what the messenger would get for his trouble."

"We can but make our report and have the job off our hands," remarked another.

Santillez received the news of the men's failure with no sign of the uneasiness that troubled his mind. Unlike the rest of the gang, there was not a particle of superstitious fear in his nature. What he did dread was that some human mortal might steal upon him unawares and plunge a knife in his heart.

Putting the best face possible on the matter, and watchful as a hawk, he sat down to his dinner. Then he started out to see that his vessel was properly moored and to bring ashore his beautiful victim.

Finding her state-room still barred from within, he burst it open and roughly ordered her to accompany him.

To refuse was worse than useless. Without a word the lady lifted her child in her arms, and followed her captor to the decks. Then she took her place in the boat and was landed on the beach. With a look of calm resignation upon her lovely features, the woman slowly ascended the steep stairway with her burden.

True, the pirate offered to relieve her of it; but with a look of intense loathing she pushed aside his outstretched hand, shuddering at the instant contact.

"Never mind, my lady," thought the villain, grimly; "a few days will be sufficient to take the spirit out of you, I fancy."

Reaching the main apartment of his quarters, he touched a spring in the wall. A concealed door swung open, revealing an apartment excelling in richness of interior his own luxurious one.

Opposite the door, on the side toward the sea, were two good-sized windows which served to give light to the apartment. These windows were concealed from without by matted vines. Notwithstanding the luxury of the apartment it was a prison.

Crossing the windows were heavy iron bars whose purpose was obvious.

"This is to be your own quarters, my beauty," announced the pirate, with a triumphant smile. "I shall often come to keep you company; never fear. I'm sorry I can't stay longer, just now; but you see a man in my position has a good deal on his hands. However, you will not be out of my thoughts. Your meals will be supplied to you at the proper time, without the aid of hands. To-morrow morning I shall again have the pleasure of calling upon you, so look your prettiest when I come. All you want is to be bad for the asking. You shall dress like a queen and have gems by the bushel. Surely no woman could ask more."

So saying, he retired with a mocking bow and closed the door behind him.

"Supper for three to-night, Baba," he ordered. "Sancho and Ferdinand are to sup with me."

Soon afterward the two alluded to appeared, and the party sat down to a table loaded with delicacies. "Any news yet, of our strange enemy?" asked the chief.

"None, senor," was the reply, "and the men are uneasy. They say the island is haunted."

"Nonsense," retorted the pirate; "show me some sign, and—"

The words died out on his lips.

Bold as he was, a sight met his eyes that made him tremble.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL.

Good cause indeed had the iron nerves of the pirate to quail. Even as the bold challenge trembled on his lips, the three candles ranged around the walls flickered and expired at the same instant.

Over on the rocky wall in letters of luminous light, appeared these warning words:

"Pirates, your days are numbered!"

Speechless with terror, with staring eyes, and teeth rattling like castanets, the pirate gazed in dread fascination upon those warning words.

His challenge had indeed been promptly answered. "Lights! Baba!" he shrieked, hoarsely. "By all the fiends, bring lights at once!"

The terror-stricken dwarf with shaking limbs hastened to obey; fresh candles were produced and lighted, but all attempts to make the old ones burn, failed.

"More of them!" cried the pirate, and candle after candle was added to the number, until the room was a blaze of light.

Then, and not till then, did the human sea-tiger begin to breathe easier. Every moment, while the darkness enveloped him, he had expected to feel the deadly grasp of his mysterious enemy upon his throat. Filling his glass to the brim, he tossed its contents down his capacious throat. Another and another followed until the fiery stimulant had restored his courage.

His two subordinates were even more terror-stricken than himself.

"Ha! ha! a pretty good joke, my comrades," exclaimed the pirate with a laugh, terrible in its hollow mockery. "Never mind what you've seen, though, for I've a plan in my head that will set things all right again. The fact is, our quarters here are getting rather uncomfortable. You'll agree with me in that, no doubt. Well, the world is large and there's as good dens for us as this has been. In brief, I've decided on gathering up our traps and leaving the island. How those Yankees will rage when they come back and find we have flown! What think you of the plan?"

"Nothing would suit us all better," said both men in a breath. "Besides, senor," continued Sancho, "so long as the men are troubled with the dread of spirits they will be no better than a pack of cowards. I'm glad they haven't actually seen anything to upset them as yet, so they are still manageable. Think, though, what would have happened had words of fire appeared before their eyes. Let us once more be clear of the island, and they will be the same brave men as of old."

Very suddenly, indeed, had the pirate chief come to his determination. Had the suggestion been made to him five minutes before his eyes were staggered by that warning, he would have laughed it to scorn.

Crafty to a degree he was still shrewd enough to make it appear that his resolve had been slowly formed.

"Yes," said he, "I have already arranged my plans. The cruiser will doubtless return as quickly as possible. Once our hiding-place is surely known and they will be around our ears as thick as hornets. He shall find his game has once more slipped him."

"We will to work at once to load the Isabelle with our choicest goods. The balance we will bury until there is a good chance to return for them. You, Sancho, will take half the men and work till midnight. Ferdinand will relieve you then with the remainder, and by daylight we will leave this place for good."

He leaned back in his chair with the air of a man who felt that he had made a great concession. His lieutenants looked at each other uneasily. There was evidently some subject still on their minds which they had as yet failed to introduce.

Pedro Santillez was not slow to note the fact.

"You have something more to tell me," he exclaimed, sharply. "Out with it at once."

"It is your duty, you know," remarked Ferdinand, in a low tone to his companion.

"And an ugly one it is," muttered Sancho, in reply.

Then aloud, with an air of bravado he was far from feeling, he said:

"The fact is, senor chief, the men have got a queer idea in their heads."

"Well?"

"They've made up their minds already to leave the island to-night."

"Have they?" roared the pirate. "That shall be as I please. Go on with what you have to say!" he commanded, with a sneer.

"It was all talked over among them, this afternoon, senor," continued Sancho, rapidly and eying his chief nervously as he spoke. "They count on your consenting to the plan of course, but—"

"Out with it!" roared the chief.

"Well then—they say—the woman must be left behind."

The secret was out at last.

"Do they?" snarled the chief, with flashing eyes.

but regaining his temper by an effort, he said slowly.

"They are very considerate, indeed, to arrange my plans for me. Perhaps as they've been kind enough to do that they will choose another to lead them—yourself perhaps."

The words were spoken lightly but there was a deep meaning beneath them. The pirate evidently fancied that his chief officer had been working to supplant him in authority, and distrusted him accordingly.

Sancho had got safely through the most difficult part of his task. He had greatly feared that his life would pay the penalty for telling the chief the men's determination. The rest of the task was comparatively easy.

With all the man's faults he was still loyal to his chief.

"No, senor," he replied, "you cannot mean that. Rest assured they would fight under no other leader but yourself. They say, though, that the woman's cry when you robbed her of her brat, still disturbs their dreams. She has brought a curse with her, and no good luck can come of it while she is with us."

"Probably, they would be content if I should throw her over the cliff!" the chief suggested, with evident scorn.

"They might, senor; I cannot say," replied Sancho, not heeding the sarcasm that lurked beneath his chief's words. "Shall I see what they say to the proposal?"

"No, you fool! Think you I have ruled this band so long, only to be dictated to now? When I leave the island, the woman goes with me. Tell the dogs that is my answer. They can accept it if they choose or stay where they are until doomsday. Go to them and report my words, and let me hear their answer at once."

It was fully half an hour before the burly lieutenant returned.

"They refuse to listen to it, senor," said he gravely. "Never have I seen men so determined as they."

"Then they can stay where they are."

"Pardon, senor, but they swear they will not remain on the island until daylight."

"Ha!" gasped the pirate, springing to his feet, "this is mutiny! The devils shall not defy me thus."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PIRATE'S HOARD.

The right hand of the irate pirate rested upon a cocked pistol.

"It is no fault of mine, senor," said Sancho, doggedly. "No mortal man can say aught to turn them from their purpose."

For a full minute Santillez stood undecided how to act. His burly lieutenant expected instant death at his hands. At length a crafty, cruel smile crept over the pirate chief's face. Thrusting the pistol slowly back in his belt, he again seated himself.

"Very well, Sancho; need must go when the devil drives. Tell the men that I grant their kind request. It is the first time I have been called upon for such a sacrifice, and they can rest assured it will also be the last."

No mistaking his meaning, now. Well they knew that a menace lay beneath those quiet-spoken words.

The two men touched their caps in salute and retired. Glad enough were they to escape unharmed from the presence of their angry and excited leader.

"I wouldn't go through such a job as that again for a handsome sum," remarked Sancho to his companion when they were well out of the pirate's hearing.

"Nor I, either," was the laconic reply.

"At any rate, we have done better than I expected. Rest assured, though, he means to have satisfaction upon us. Wait until we are safely in our new quarters and you will see I have spoken rightly."

Meanwhile, Santillez was pacing the floor of his apartment like a crazed beast. The men he had always looked upon as merely slaves to do his bidding had actually defied his power! Turn in what direction he would, the chief could see no way to regain his lost power.

"It is useless for me to fight against them now," he muttered, with an angry scowl. "Let them beware of the future, though! Pedro Santillez neither forgets nor forgives. And now I suppose I must see to it that my gold is ready for removal."

So saying, he turned and entered the room he occupied as a bedchamber.

"Here I was safe," his thoughts ran, his mind still brooding over his troubles. "It will be long before I can find a spot with so many accommodations as I have here."

Walking toward a small closet, he opened the door, but only to start back with a loud cry.

"What!" he gasped. "Is it gone?"

Yes, he had spoken truly. Instead of the heavy bags of gold and the glittering bars of the precious metal, his eyes fell upon—emptiness!

A hoarse cry of rage broke from his pallid lips. "Perdition seize me!" he gasped. "Am I dreaming? Baba, come here!"

The dwarf appeared at his side.

"What means this? Where is the gold I left in your keeping?"

The dwarf glanced for a moment at the empty closet. Then he dropped on his knees at the pirate's feet in abject terror.

"Ah, he knows nothing of it, I see!" muttered Sancho, giving the poor dwarf a contemptuous

kick. "Who, then, is this mysterious person that steals gold when he can by no means carry it away? I cannot tell the men this, else they would tear me to pieces. They would declare that I had hidden it for my own use, for spirits are not in the habit of performing such tricks. Baba, leave me!"

"I see my way out of it, at last," said the pirate when he was again alone.

I must tell them it is too much to risk all our treasures at once in the schooner.

The gold, then, is securely hidden until we can return for it without fear of our Yankee enemy.

That story ought to satisfy them and it must.

He saw also that if the crew believed him to be the sole possessor of such a secret, they would be far less liable to do him an injury.

Feeling anxious to know how much influence he still possessed over his desperadoes, he prepared to go down among them.

A wicked smile crept over his scarred face as he took up the deadly poniard he could throw with such skill, and thrust it up his sleeve.

He found the men busily engaged in the task of removing their valuables from the cave.

They worked on moodily and in silence.

He strolled carelessly in among them.

Not an eye met his own; but a look of grim determination rested upon the faces of all, and turning on his heel, he returned toward his own quarters.

As he ascended the rocky steps, something glittered at his feet in the moonlight. Actuated by mere curiosity, he stooped and picked it up.

Suddenly his whole manner changed to one of intense excitement and surprise. He hurried back to his room to examine the article more closely by candle-light. It was a small and curiously-shaped pocket-knife mounted in silver, which he had more than once seen in the possession of one of his men, and that man was John Frazer, whom he had believed dead.

He saw his mistake now.

The truth of the whole mystery came to his mind like a flash. The individual who had invaded his quarters in his absence was the man whom he had once so nearly hung.

This, then, accounted for much that had appeared mysterious. All but the late handwriting on the wall, and that at least could hardly be produced by human agency.

"Ah!" hissed the pirate, between his set teeth, "he thinks to measure skill with me, does he? But he shall not escape from me thus. Nor shall the Isabelle hoist a sail to leave the spot until he is found. With him alone rests the secret where the gold is hidden. He shall reveal it if I have to tear it from him by slow torture. I begin to see my way clear at last."

Let us go back to the man now uppermost in the pirate's thoughts, and see what he has been doing.

For once in his life, John Frazer had been caught off his guard. Worn out with his exertions in carrying away the pirate's gold to his own hiding-place, his body was unable to stand the strain. His overtaxed energies were compelled to rest.

As he dropped the last bag of gold among its fellows, he sat wearily down to rest, and in a moment more he was soundly sleeping. Little did he calculate how long would be that slumber. Nature at last held full sway, and kept it until she was satisfied.

When John Frazer again awoke, the sun was well up in the heavens. He groped his way to the narrow crevice that formed the mouth of his hiding-place, and looked out.

From this spot he had a clear view of the channel. To his unbounded dismay, he saw the pirate schooner approaching the channel under a full spread of canvas.

"He has seen the signal and taken the alarm," said Frazer, coolly.

"Fate seems to be against me still," he remarked; "but, while there is life there is hope. At any rate I have taken all due precautions. Ere long he will see something that will make even his nerves tremble, I fancy. It is a fortunate thing that I secured that case of chemicals. They may prove to be of considerable value to me yet."

Let us pause for a moment to explain to the reader the meaning of his words.

Among the pirate's stores he had found a valuable case of chemicals. As the pirate knew nothing of the nature of the contents, he had probably taken the case for the fine workmanship on it. In this case was a vial of phosphorus. With this substance John Frazer had traced upon the wall of the pirate's room the warning which had caused him such terror. With another substance he had painted a ring around each candle at the same distance from the bottom. All this had been accomplished in the dwarf's absence, so he was ignorant of it. At the time he had merely done it as an act of precaution, little thinking that it would actually be of service.

How was it, though, that the daring man had so cunningly contrived to escape the prying eyes of his enemies?

The answer is soon given.

Well up on the face of the cliff, with an entrance so narrow that it seemed a mere crevice in the rock, was the spot he had chosen. So narrow was the entrance that it was with difficulty he could force his way through it. So smooth was the face of the cliff below him that it seemed impossible for a man's foot to scale its sides. Not a man save himself knew of its existence. Situated as it was, it formed a most admirable place for his purpose. Within, the cave was nearly three-sided, and about six feet in its widest part.

In that spot every particle of the pirate's ill-got-

ten gold was safely lying. Beside it was a quantity of provisions sufficient to last the occupant for a few days at least.

Lying prone upon his stomach, his keen, gray eyes peering through the entrance, he had seen his blood-thirsty enemies pass beneath him in their search.

From the words carelessly dropped from their lips he gathered the information that they were searching blindly. He saw that they did not even suspect his identity. This surprised him not a little, and he resolved to use the information to good service.

Motionless as a log, he remained until darkness closed in upon the scene. Then slowly and cautiously he emerged from his retreat. There was little fear in his heart now of being discovered. The cliff faced toward the sea, while the pirates' quarters were upon the other side of the rocky wall.

As light-footed as a mountain goat, he proceeded to make his way up the steep face of the cliff in a diagonal direction. He intended, if possible, to gain the spot where the windows of the pirate's apartment opened on the face of the cliff. He could see the place clearly in the faint light of the rising moon.

Foot by foot, he crept on his perilous way. One careless step and his body would be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. Every line of his features betrayed a stern purpose. He was within a dozen feet of the place.

Suddenly he stopped, and, bending forward, listened with bated breath.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SANTILLEZ DEFIANT.

It was the voice of the pirate chief that had thus arrested his attention. He was speaking imperatively to some one, and that one evidently a woman. John Frazer had gained the spot at the moment Santillez was ushering his victim into what was to be her prison.

The listener strained forward to catch her reply; but the woman remained silent.

As the pirate uttered his parting threat, the steely gray eyes of John Frazer flashed fire and his fist clenched tightly.

Again he reached forward to listen, for the woman was speaking earnestly enough now.

Ah, yes! She was upon her bended knees, praying earnestly to Heaven for deliverance from her enemies.

"That prayer is heard and will be answered," was the thought that crept into John Frazer's heart. "Heaven designs me for the instrument that is to thwart the villain in his purpose. Now I begin to see why my former plans have been allowed to fail."

He listened again, but all was now silent.

"If it lies in my power, I will gladden her heart with the knowledge that a friend is near," said he, firmly.

Unfortunately for his purpose, the spot from whence the sound proceeded, was beyond the window of the pirate's room.

More than that, the face of the cliff at that point was absolutely inaccessible. No chance there to find a foothold he saw at a glance. Nothing but a few frail vines clinging to its face with their delicate tendrils.

He slowly made his way forward until he had gained the pirate's window, and again listened.

He could hear the voices of the pirate's lieutenants as they greeted their chief. He was also a delighted listener to the pirates' terror at the sight of that strange handwriting on the wall. His eyes glittered with pleasure at the success of his plans and the turn affairs had taken.

He reasoned in a moment that the pirate would not wish to take his victim's life. On the contrary, he would probably contrive some way to return for her after his men's fears had been lulled to rest in their new retreat. He at last understood thoroughly the nature of the villain he was endeavoring to outwit. Should his reasoning but prove true, he could easily release the prisoner the moment the island was abandoned.

It puzzled him some, though, to think how he had managed to overlook the apartment whose existence he had now, for the first time, become aware of.

While the pirate was cursing his luck and hurling anathemas upon the head of the man who had stolen his treasures, the thief—if such he could be called—was enjoying his discomfiture within a few feet of where he stood.

When at last the pirate left the room to join his men below, John Frazer proposed to carry out the daring plan he had already conceived.

First assuring himself that his way was clear, he pushed aside the vines and crept through.

Passing from the bedroom into the larger apartment, he came suddenly upon the dwarf. The latter was now completely terrified by the complication of strange mysteries going on so rapidly around him. He gave one startled glance in the face of the man before him, and dropped on his knees in an attitude of mute entreaty. He had survived all fear of his master's wrath now, and life was doubly dear to him.

But, John Frazer had no wish to do him an injury if it could be avoided.

"To your room, slave!" he cried sternly; "I need you not."

With an expressive glance of relief, the dwarf obeyed.

Opening the trap-door in the floor of the apartment, John Frazer descended the narrow steps leading to the secret entrance to the cave. Reaching the bottom, he could distinctly hear the pirates as they busied themselves in removing the treasure.

For a long time he remained motionless, for every scrap of conversation that dropped from their lips was valuable. From them he gathered the informa-

tion that the majority of them were in favor of leaving the island at the earliest possible moment.

A few of their number, however, were still courageous enough to face the mystery for a day longer. The reason for this was that they did not care to run the channel by night a second time if it could be avoided.

While they were thus busily engaged at their task, they were suddenly startled by the stern command: "Depart!"

The voice, low, deep and powerful, seemed to emerge from the very ground at their feet!

With a yell of terror, they dropped the goods they were carrying and with one rush gained the open air beyond.

Their lieutenant, Sancho, was sitting outside, calmly smoking a cigar. The mysterious voice had not reached his ears.

"What now?" he demanded, uneasily, as the men, recovering a little, began to assemble in a group.

One of their number stepped forward and briefly told what had transpired.

The recollection of that handwriting on the wall was still fresh in the lieutenant's mind. He could not doubt the truth of their words. A panic seemed to have seized upon the hearts of the former daring scoundrels. Human foes they would have faced boldly; but nothing could induce them to face what they believed to be an avenging spirit.

No threats or persuasions could compel them to step foot again in the cave.

"Stay!" exclaimed Sancho, suddenly. "It wants but a half-hour of midnight. Say not a word to the rest of what has happened. It will be but a short time now before Ferdinand will relieve us with his gang. If they, too, receive the mysterious warning, we shall know it is advisable to leave the island at once. In the meantime, you can take these cases around us and carry them down to the schooner."

The men grudgingly assented to his proposition. There was no division of opinion among them now. The boldest among them was ready, ay, and anxious to be gone from the spot that held such mysteries.

Promptly, at midnight, they were relieved, as agreed upon.

Pedro Santillez, who had gone on board the schooner for some errand of his own, had been in ignorance of what had transpired.

As Ferdinand's men busied themselves at their task, Santillez strolled toward the cave. Suddenly, he was startled by a rush from the entrance. In the excitement of the moment, he fancied his life was to be attempted, and laid his hands upon his weapons. A second glance, however, showed that he was unheeded.

The expression upon the faces of the men, as they rushed past him, was absolute fear.

It was some moments before he could gather from their frightened lips what had happened; then it transpired that they, too, had received the same ghastly warning that had alarmed the others.

"You have been fooled by your imaginations," said the pirate, sternly. "Send Sancho hither, at once. If his men have heard anything unusual, I shall be inclined to believe you."

His face paled slightly, however, as the lieutenant told his tale. It agreed exactly with what he had heard from the lips of those around him. Still, the pirate stubbornly refused to admit its truth. He was standing close to the entrance of the cave, as he said:

"Men! if you are cowards to be frightened at nothing, I am not. This is a plot among some of your number to hurry us away from the island. Are there five men among you that will volunteer to help me search the cave?"

No, there was not even one man to respond to that challenge.

"Very well," said the pirate, coolly, as he laid his hand upon his weapon; "then I will go alone."

As he finished speaking, and turned to enter the cave, a deep rich voice issuing from the solid rock above said sternly:

"Enter here at your peril!"

CHAPTER XXV.

EVIL FOR EVIL. A DEATH RACE.

The pirate's cheek paled as those ringing words fell upon his ears. Brave as he undoubtedly was, he feared to face that terrible and mysterious voice. His followers drew hastily back and watched their chief with intense eagerness. Would he still dare to brave those hidden dangers?

Santillez read the thoughts that chased over their countenances. His own face suddenly assumed a look of iron determination.

"Men," said he, "you refuse to aid me in this. Let me show you that I at least am not to be defied. Ay, I will enter now, though all the devils in perdition should seek to oppose me. I fancy, though, that it will only turn out to be a human being."

So saying, he carefully examined the priming of his pistols. Then snatching a lantern from the hands of one of his men, he passed in the entrance with a firm unflinching step.

At that instant a fearful explosion shook the very ground beneath their feet. Huge volumes of black sulphurous smoke came rushing from out the mouth of the cave, enveloping them all in its thick folds.

Well indeed had that mysterious voice fulfilled its threat!

Terrified beyond measure, blinded by the smoke, the pirates with one accord rushed for the schooner beyond. Heedless were they now of the rich goods lying scattered along the shore! Had they been bars of gold or glittering diamonds, they would have passed them by unnoticed.

A terrible fear had seized upon them all. Their only thought now was to fly from the spot that held such horrors.

Their lieutenant Sancho hurriedly gave his orders to get the schooner under way when informed by Ferdinand of what had happened.

There was little need of his words. The crew were already madly working to that end. And foremost among them was Baba, the dwarf!

Never had he been known to step foot upon the schooner's deck since his first arrival among them. Frightened at the sudden meeting with his mysterious enemy, he had hastened from his old quarters. Uncertain at first what to do, he had finally joined Ferdinand's gang.

His eyes had also beheld the awful fate of his master.

Very swiftly did the pirates do their work. Within ten minutes' time from the moment of the explosion, the schooner's sails were spread, her cable cut loose, and she began to gather headway.

Sancho seized the wheel himself. There was a wild light in his eyes and his brawny hands were a trifle unsteady. The scenes he had passed through that night had caused him to drink deeply and often. He showed it plainly enough, too; but the men were too much frightened to pay heed to him then.

The moon was partly hidden behind flying clouds. Occasionally its light would disappear altogether, and then the pirate at the helm was compelled to trust to luck. Outside, the wind was blowing heavily, throwing the spray high in the air, as the waves broke over the reefs.

The schooner, as if possessed with the same wild frenzy that had seized her crew, reeled unsteadily on her course, for her helmsman was unfit for the task he had undertaken.

Ah! well did she need the strong sinewy arm of her former commander at that critical moment!

Had he but heeded that terrible warning, he might now be with his followers, instead of lying a blackened corpse in the cave yonder.

But there was no time then for vain regrets. Half a mile distant was the open sea; but the most dangerous part of their task was still to come.

Crash! The schooner's side rasped against the black rocks with a grating sound that threatened to tear the timbers from her frame.

Every tongue was mute.

Then the schooner dashed madly on her way again. Reeling like a drunken man, she struck the rocks on the other side with a force that nearly carried them from her feet.

Clear once more and rushing on; but by this time the crew has realized the truth.

"Aft with us, boys!" cried the second-lieutenant, who stood among them. "That drunken fool will send us all to the bottom in another minute."

Following his lead, the pirates made a rush for the wheel.

For an instant they hesitated.

The helmsman, now literally maddened with liquor, leveled a pistol at their heads.

"Back, you fools!" he cried, in thick, husky tones. "I command this vessel now, and I'll stand no nonsense."

Only for an instant did the crew hesitate. Then, with one desperate rush, they were upon him. There was the sharp report of a pistol and Ferdinand dropped to the deck shot through the heart by Sancho's hand.

In an instant more, the madman, fighting with desperate strength, had been forced back from the wheel. It was instantly seized by one of the pirates, while the rest strove to disarm their leader.

Thrice did he break from their united grasp and strive to reach the wheel; but, foiled in this, he seized a handspike, and swinging it around as a club, mowed down his nearest enemies.

Before he could again raise his terrible weapon, the crew were upon him. With one wild rush they bore him to the deck. There was a flashing of knives in the moonlight. In another moment they had found a bloody sheath in the heart of their fallen comrade. Then, seizing the quivering body, they hurled it over the side, with a yell of infernal triumph.

"Revenge!" they cried, little thinking in their excitement of the perils still surrounding them.

It was to be a night filled with terrors. The pirate at the wheel had glanced over the side as the body of the madman was swept astern.

That short interval of time was fatal. He did not notice that black rock raising its head just before him. Once more the struggling schooner struck heavily against her hidden enemies. Away went the main-boom, broken short off at the neck, and away went both topmasts at the caps.

The gallant vessel recoiled heavily from the shock; then slipping away from the shelving rock that had obstructed her path, she darted on again like a wounded bird.

A dozen contradictory orders fell from as many different lips. The crew were wildly demoralized. There was no clear head among them now, to assume command, and bring order out of confusion. No man among them now believed the timbers would hold together after that last terrible collision. Some one, more thoughtful than the rest, sounded the pumps.

A foot of water in the hold and still the open sea was not yet reached!

A scene of indescribable confusion reigned on the deck of the doomed craft. The schooner's days were fast drawing to a close. The fact of her going to the bottom was only a question of time. It might be an hour or it might be but ten minutes. They knew not.

What wonder then that they stood appalled. Many

of them were in favor of attempting to reach the island again. Their mysterious foe could hardly be as much dreaded as the certain fate that awaited them there. They had not even a boat to depend on. In the excitement of leaving the island and gaining the schooner's decks, no one had thought of securing the painter, and so that was lost. Even had they possessed it, not half their number could be placed within it.

While they were still hurriedly debating the question, the schooner had gained the open sea. Presently the moon emerged from the clouds, with renewed brilliancy.

"The cruiser!" they cried, in a breath, as they saw a huge ship bearing down toward them. "We must run for it now."

No one had noticed it before in their excitement.

Half a mile distant, with every sail set and flying like the wind, the avenging cruiser bore down upon them. She had sighted her foe and her bow-gun already spoke her purpose. No desire had the pirates, now, of being hunted into their holes like rats. Better at least to take the desperate chance of escaping by flight, even though they knew that their gallant vessel had received its mortal wound.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MISSIVE AND THE MISSILE.

WHERE was the pirates' rendezvous? That was the question that puzzled the officers of the Vixen to answer. Right quickly would they have entered upon their vengeance did they but know where to find their daring foe.

While they were debating the question, and trying to get at some tangible clew, a young tar appeared in the doorway.

"Second cutter has returned, sir," he announced, respectfully.

"How's this?" demanded Captain Clark, a little angrily. "I told Mr. Jackson he was to remain on board until further orders."

"Mr. Jackson is still on board, sir," replied the messenger, promptly. "He told me to put this note and this bottle into your own hands immediately."

As he spoke he handed a note to the captain and deposited an unsealed bottle upon the table before him.

Glancing his eye over the missive, the captain read aloud:

"CAPTAIN CLARK, OF THE VIXEN:

"DEAR SIR—I have the honor to report that the accompanying bottle—tightly sealed—has just been picked up by one of the cutter's men alongside."

"As soon as I read the contents I concluded to send it to you at once, as it contains news of great importance, if true. As I cannot return myself, until further orders, I place it in the hands of the coxswain for delivery."

"Very respectfully,

"ARTHUR JACKSON, Midshipman."

With a rather shaky hand, Captain Clark snatched up the second paper protruding from the neck of the bottle.

It ran as follows:

"To any honest man in whose hands this may chance to fall:

"This is to inform the world that I am a prisoner in the hands of pirates. Six months ago I was a passenger in the ship Albatross, bound from Rio Janeiro to New York. While in these waters we were captured by Pedro Santillez, the pirate, otherwise known as the Bloodhound of the Seas. Of all the souls on board, I am the only one surviving, and my life was spared by the merest chance. Under great difficulties I have learned the secret of the pirates' retreat. It is a small, rock-bound island, surrounded by reefs, and entered by a narrow channel running between two tall cliffs. This is the tenth missive I have cast into the sea in the hope of making my situation known to some kind heart. Please forward it to the United States Government, to which country I belong. My every movement is closely watched by the scoundrels, so that it is with the greatest difficulty I write this. Even now—"

The writing ended abruptly with a long scratch of the pencil, as if the writer had been suddenly startled and compelled to leave his task unfinished.

The faces of the officers were a study as the captain finished his reading and glanced toward them. Surprise, delight and exultation were expressed upon them all.

We must except one, and that one was their new acquaintance—the father of their first lieutenant.

The arms of the Yankee skipper were resting upon the table, and his face was buried in his bronzed hands. He seemed as if stricken with some great calamity.

"What now, Captain Jones?" said the Vixen's commander, in some astonishment.

"Here the very information we've been wishing for has suddenly dropped into our hands at the right moment, and yet you do not seem to share in our rejoicing."

"It is the will of Heaven and the hand of Providence that has done this," answered the old man, reverently. "It is wrong for me to repine. When I tell you why I am sad, you will wonder no longer. My late passenger's husband was suddenly called home, as I have already told you. I believed that he was safely there, before this; but, the letter you have just read tells me I am indeed mistaken. He was one of the passengers in that fatal ship."

A deep silence fell upon them all at these startling words. Captain Clark was the first to speak.

"All is not lost yet," said he, kindly. "May it not

be possible that the writer of this letter and Colonel Sanders are one and the same person?"

"Impossible!" said the old man, sadly. "I know his determined nature only too well. While a drop of blood was left in his veins he would use it to fight his enemies. The pirates do not spare the lives of such men as he. There were two other passengers on the 'Albatross,' I know. Colonel Sanders tried to procure a passage for his wife in the same vessel, but her captain refused. He had a belief that it would bring him bad luck to have a woman on board his vessel. As the colonel could not wait longer, he was compelled to leave her behind him. Well, Providence is merciful in this case. The colonel would not have survived the loss of his wife and child, for he loved them to distraction."

"Then that same Providence shall use us as its instrument to avenge them both," declared Captain Clark, earnestly. "We know now where to find our enemies. Our anchor shall not again rest on bot om until the whole nest of cutthroats are swept from the sea."

The looks of warm approval that spread over the faces of the officers at these words fully expressed their feelings.

"You will need my foretopmast, now, cap'n," said the Yankee skipper, rousing himself to action. "My craft yonder is but little more than a wreck, anyhow, and I want to see those villains hung afore I p'int for home again."

"I accept your offer with pleasure," replied Captain Clark. "If there is any thing I can do in return for your kindness, let me know at once, for we have no time to lose now."

"Nothing, except to send your doctor aboard to patch us up a bit," was the reply, "for we've been knocked to pieces nearly as bad as the old brig. I'm not much good at patchin' up a man, either," he added, with a smile.

His request was promptly granted. Five minutes later the second cutter was pulling back to the brig. She was closely followed by the Vixen's launch, with a crew of sailors in her to remove the looted foretopmast. Not an hour afterward it was safely hoisted alongside the "Vixen."

Then the cruiser, without losing a moment of her valuable time, forged slowly ahead, her crew, busy as bees, engaged in fitting the new spar to its place.

The brig slowly followed behind. The second cutter's crew had been placed on board to relieve her own. They had naught to do but look on while the new-comers, with practiced skill, proceeded to restore her rigging to its proper shape. A spare spar from the frigate served in place of the one lost.

Making the best use in their power of the materials at hand, the "Vixen's" men soon restored things to a presentable shape.

Under the circumstances, the old brig was getting along remarkably well. The two vessels were but a few miles from the spot where they expected to find their foe. The officers of the "Vixen" had recognized the very island described in the letter as being the same one they had before watched in suspicion.

On board the "Nancy Jones" the cruiser's surgeon proceeded to examine the extent of her survivors' wounds. He pronounced none of them serious, if they were careful to keep as quiet as possible.

As for the victims of the pirate's wrath, lying beneath the flag, they were quietly sewn in hammocks. A round shot was placed at the feet of each.

Captain Zeke himself read the solemn service over their remains, while the tears coursed silently down his cheeks. Then the bodies were committed to their deep and last resting-place.

By midnight the Vixen had approached close to the island she was in search of. Half an hour afterward, her crew were awakened to excitement by the cry from the mast-head.

"Sail ho!"

"Where-away?" cried Captain Clark.

"Dead ahead, sir!"

The captain seized his glass and hastily mounted the main rigging. All ears were ready to catch his words.

"Set to gallant sails and royals!"

"Aloft, sail-loosers!"

The men flew to their posts at the word. Very quickly the cruiser began to gather renewed speed as the sails were sheeted home.

"Gentlemen," announced Captain Clark, as he rejoined his officers on the quarter-deck, "yonder vessel is the pirates' schooner and she's running out of the channel. Beat to quarters at once."

The long roll of the drum, slow at first, then increasing to a rapid tattoo, sounded over the ship. The gallant sailors were hurrying in every direction. In half a minute every man was at his post and awaiting the next order.

"Clear away the bow-gun!"

"All clear, sir!"

"I want you to put a hole through the hull of yonder scoundrel. Are you all ready?"

"Ready it is, sir."

"Then, fire!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BLOODHOUND'S DOOM.

NOBLY indeed was John Frazer carrying out his scheme of vengeance upon his savage enemies.

As the reader has doubtless already surmised, it was his agency that had caused those mysterious warnings. He was an accomplished ventriloquist.

Standing at the foot of those stairs and separated from his foes by a partition of thin rock, he had caused his voice to appear as if it came from the ground at their feet. From his position, he could even over-

hear much of the frightened pirates' conversation at the mouth of the cave.

As Ferdinand's men fled, at that second warning, John Frazer opened the secret door and entered the darkened cave. He moved like a man who thoroughly knew his ground.

For a few moments he busied himself in the darkness, and then, with a low exclamation of satisfaction, he hurried back to his place of concealment.

It changed to one of dismay and irritation as he heard Santillez utter his bold resolve.

It was then that he uttered the words: "Enter at your peril!"

"I hope he will heed the warning in time," he muttered. "I have a different fate in store for him."

He paused only long enough to assure himself that the pirate was still determined.

"His fate be upon his own head, now," said he as he hastened up the narrow stairway.

He had barely reached the top before that muffled rumbling sound was heard.

The powder he had so carefully prepared had done its work and with it departed the life of his bitter enemy. Then he raised the trap-door, and re-entered the pirate's quarters. The dwarf was nowhere to be seen.

Assuring himself first that the latter was not in hiding somewhere around, John Frazer walked to the door and glanced down in the moonlight. He could dimly see the forms of the terrified pirates below, as they fled like frightened sheep toward the schooner. A smile of intense delight and triumph shot over his face at the sight.

Taking a night-glass from the wall, he could clearly distinguish his enemies' faces. Long and keen was the scrutiny. But that of the daring chief was missing from among them.

"Well, the world is at last rid of one great villain," said he, quietly; "but I should have preferred to see him swinging from a yard-arm. Now I will run down to the carronades at the mouth of the harbor. If Providence will but aid me, I will sink the schooner before she clears the channel."

He turned, and snatching up a lighted candle, hurriedly descended the secret stairway to the shore.

Alas for his plans! The explosion in the cave had ruined the passage also. He returned to the other entrance. The moon, shining full upon the rocky stairs, would reveal him to his foes.

There was a chance that the pirates might recognize him, suspect his agency in what had transpired, and return. He possessed too much wisdom to take a risk that might ruin his carefully-laid plans. So, with a sigh, he abandoned his purpose.

Then, peering through the glass, he watched the schooner as she began her perilous passage through the channel.

"She is badly steered," he muttered, in surprise. "If they are not more careful than that, they will—ah!"

The exclamation that broke from his lips was caused by the schooner scraping sharply against the rocks at that moment.

Suddenly, there came to him the recollection of the woman imprisoned near him. With a wild desire to share his joy with her, he determined to seek the entrance to her room. Knowing that the secret door must open from the main apartment, he began a hurried search.

While he was thus engaged, a dark object bounded into the apartment, with a howl of rage. It was the form of a man that showed in the dim light; but the face was blackened and begrimed with powder, and the velvet clothing hung in rags.

The pirate had escaped with his life, after all; but too late to rejoin his crew!

With a fiendish yell, he sprang at the throat of the man who had caused his terrible punishment. One bound and he was upon him.

Over and over the two men rolled in that terrible death-grapple.

John Frazer was still cool and wary. Watching a favorable opportunity, he seized his enemy by the head, and dashed it upon the stony floor, and thus the pirate was knocked senseless. Springing to his feet, John Frazer's eye fell upon the arm-chair that had so nearly caused his own destruction. It was a quick way to secure his foe, he thought, as he picked up the pirate and forced him within its strong clutches. Nor did he notice at the time where the chair was standing.

Then he hastily resumed his search for the secret door. In a moment more he touched the spring and the door flew open. He sprang forward, only to stand still the next moment as if turned to stone.

The lady sprang up with an exclamation of terror, but almost instantly it changed to one of great joy.

The beautiful boy gave one glance in the face of the man before him.

Then, with one glad cry of "Papa!" he sprang into the outstretched arms.

The spell was broken.

Yes, it was true. The man and woman so suddenly brought face to face were husband and wife!

All thoughts now of the flying pirates were drowned in the great joy of that meeting. Little had he dreamed, when he heard the woman's voice in prayer, that it belonged to one so dear to him.

Very hurriedly she stated her story.

In return, the man, no longer a mystery, related how he had come to be the only survivor of the fated "Albatross."

The ship had been nobly defended by her crew to the last. Feeling that his own death was shortly to come, he had yet humanely stooped to relieve the agony of a wounded pirate. The latter, grateful, demanded that his life be spared and Santillez granted the favor to him. Not so much, though, because his follower asked it, but because he saw that the man was likely to prove of value to him. His judgment in this case was good, for Colo-

nel Sanders had been an army surgeon before gaining his present title. Not caring to hear his honored name soiled by contact with a pirate's life, he had called himself John Frazer, and as such was known among them. Not long afterward, in attacking another ship, the pirate chief was badly wounded, and to John Frazer's skill he owed his life. It was in consequence of that same wound, compelling him to remain quiet for awhile, that he had intrusted the command of the schooner, for a short time, to his lieutenant. John Frazer had been sent to accompany them in case his professional skill should be needed. It was he who had damaged the keg of powder by means of chemicals until it was as harmless as black sand—which it much resembled. Little did he think at the time that the act was destined to save the life of the woman he loved so dearly.

So engrossed were they in their joy that neither of them heard the distant guns which told that the pirates were still surrounded by difficulties.

Pedro Santillez had once more regained consciousness. Held in that vise-like grasp, and unable to stir, he had heard every word of that joyful meeting. He gnashed his teeth in impotent rage as he listened. His bloodshot eyes protruding from his blackened face, made him a sight fearful to behold. He would have given all the wealth the island contained for one more chance at the man who had so completely beaten him.

With all his prodigious strength, he tugged at the springs which bound him. It was hopeless. He was but as an infant in its grasp.

Horror! the chair was standing upon that fatal trap lined with sharp knives. An accident might press that secret spring that would hurl him into those awful depths below.

Ah, Pedro Santillez! Did you remember at that moment the slow torture you prepared for those poor wretches on the brig?

Then you must have felt something as they did when they saw that tiny spark slowly creeping down to that deadly powder.

Great beads of perspiration stood out on his begrimed face.

"Mercy!" he shrieked hoarsely; "spare my life, and all I have is yours!"

At that instant, Colonel Sanders, his arm thrown lovingly around the slender waist of his wife, entered the larger apartment. The other hand was clasped in that of his child.

"Do you ask mercy, scoundrel?" he asked, in a voice of terrible scorn. "Was you ever known to grant it to others, you bloody monster? You shall have justice; I shall surrender you into the hands of the law you have so long defied, and you shall hang as a dog at the yard-arm."

A sigh of intense relief broke from the pirate's lips. It was like a reprieve to a sentenced man.

Just at that moment the curly-haired boy espied the telescope which his father had laid down on the table. He broke from his father's grasp and sprang forward to reach it.

As his little hand rested upon the edge of the table to grasp it, there was a sudden cry of terror from the pirate's lips.

With that wild cry upon his hardened lips, he disappeared from their sight!

The child had become the innocent avenger of them all. His slight weight bearing upon the spring had sealed the pirate's fate.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOME AGAIN.

UNFORTUNATELY for the schooner, her enemy was approaching from windward. On the other side they were shut off by those black, treacherous rocks that had already done them such injury. Still, like brave scoundrels as they were, they held out against such heavy odds. Their vessel was leaking rapidly, and the injury to her spars retarded her speed.

The cruiser was flying down toward them, her guns held in readiness to deliver an effective broadside. Nearer and nearer came the Vixen, like an avenging fate. Her gunners standing by their pieces, were impatiently awaiting the order to fire.

Captain Clark had just delivered it when he beheld a sight that made the gunner pause.

A thick mass of red flame shot up from the schooner's decks, followed by a deafening roar. As the smoke cleared away, all traces of the pirate's vessel had disappeared!

The Vixen's boats were hastily lowered and rowed to the spot in order to rescue any that might have escaped that fearful explosion. One gasping wretch, and a few blackened bodies which the hungry sharks quickly seized upon, was all that rewarded their search. But one man of all the pirate's crew remained to tell the story, and death soon afterward relieved him of his sufferings.

But, it was not the crew of the schooner that had blown up their vessel as the commander of the Vixen had first thought.

No; that act was due to the malice of their former chief.

When Sancho had informed him of the men's intentions to leave the island that night, and without him if necessary, he had sworn a terrible revenge. Going on board the schooner, soon afterward, he had deliberately lighted the fuse whose existence was known only to himself.

"There," he had muttered, with a grim smile of satisfaction, "if they go without me they shall pay the penalty. If I conclude to go with them,—why it is easy to put out the fuse, at any time."

It was the last dastardly act of as desperate and cold-blooded a villain as ever cursed the earth and sea with his presence.

The crew of the *Vixen* were piped down, and the watch below retired to their hammocks. There was nothing to be done until daylight now, and all danger was over.

As the sun's rays once more climbed up the eastern horizon, the Yankee brig hove in sight. Signaling to her, the commander of the *Vixen* telegraphed the single word,—"Done."

Soon afterward the Nancy Jones was hove to, and the second cutter, carrying the Yankee skipper and his mate, pulled alongside the cruiser. With murmurs of satisfaction they listened to the details of the chase and its end.

"Thank God! the lady is still safe, I hope!" exclaimed the Yankee skipper, for the dying pirate had told them what the reader already knows.

Five minutes later, two of the *Vixen's* boats left her side and pulled toward the channel. It was a lovely morning, and the sharp rocks on either hand were clearly visible above the smooth waters.

As a matter of precaution lest the dying pirate had purposely misled them, the men were fully armed. They had nearly reached the narrow entrance when a strange-looking object floating upon the water, attracted Captain Clark's attention.

Directing his coxswain to steer toward it he was startled to find that it was a dead man confined to a chain. The body was so thoroughly hacked to pieces that recognition was impossible. Not even Captain Zeke—sitting beside the *Vixen's* commander—dreamed that they were gazing upon all that remained of the once dreaded pirate.

Yet it was even so.

The bottom of that terrible trap communicated with the sea, and the tide had borne its victim into the light.

Puzzled to account for the mystery, the boats again headed for the still waters beyond. Close together, the two captains ascended the rocky staircase. No living soul greeted their sight as they entered the late pirate's quarters. "We shall find the lady hereabouts, I reckon," remarked Captain Zeke, with a quaver of doubt in his honest voice.

As he spoke he pushed open the door leading to the pirate's sleeping-room.

The scene that met their eyes held them spell-bound for a moment.

Lying upon the bed, their arms lovingly clasped around each other, Colonel Sanders and his wife were sleeping, in blissful ignorance of the surprise in store for them. At their feet lay the innocent child. His golden curls shone richly in the rays of the morning sun stealing through the vines at the window.

"Well—I'll—be—blowed!" burst out the honest Yankee, with a roar of delight.

At that explosive sound, the sleepers awoke. Astounded they gazed upon the scene before them. Joyous indeed were the greetings exchanged between them all.

It was long before they had each finished their wonderful story.

It appeared, though, that the pirate had not been regardless of his victim's comfort. Her meals had been delivered to her through a concealed trap in the floor. When it was finished, the table containing it sunk slowly out of sight. This, then, was the "curious way" to which the pirate had alluded.

It transpired, afterward, that these remarkable pieces of mechanism were designed for him by a man who had fallen into his power, and who had contrived them all in the hope of getting the pirate's favor and securing his own liberty. The pirate's papers, however, revealed the fact that the man had suddenly disappeared soon after his work was completed—probably by that same manner in which the pirate met his fate.

On examination it was found that the pirate's treasure aggregated an immense sum, of which the brave colonel and his wife afterward received a goodly share.

The gold was immediately transferred to the *Vixen's* cabin, with the exception of the bag taken from the Nancy Jones, which was returned to him untouched.

Nearly a day was consumed in transporting the remaining valuables to the decks of the cruiser. Late in the afternoon the task was completed. Then the last traces of the pirate's resort were demolished.

Having completed their work to their satisfaction, the two vessels headed for the nearest port to repair damages before proceeding homeward.

Nearly two months afterward Colonel Sanders reported himself for duty and related his strange story.

Shortly afterward at his wife's earnest request, the gallant colonel tendered his resignation and retired to enjoy the remainder of his life in peace.

The Brig Nancy Jones arrived safely at her destination at last. With the profits of that cruise, the Yankee skipper forever abandoned the sea. His last act in connection with his vessel was to make her over as a gift to the brave mate whose courage had saved his life at a critical moment.

Captain Zeke's son, the young lieutenant, afterward carved out a name for himself that lives in his country's history.

The daring pirate and his deeds have almost passed into oblivion. Only the musty records stored away in the secret receptacles of the government, remain to show something of the deeds of him who was once the noted Bloodhound of the ocean.

THE END.

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